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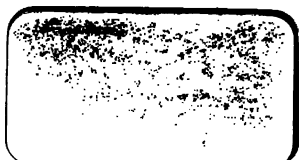
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A DOUBLE SECRET

AND

GOLDEN PIPPIN.

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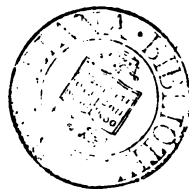
BY

JOHN POMEROY,

AUTHOR OF "OPPOSITE NEIGHBOURS," "UNTIL THE END,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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A DOUBLE SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

THE BRIDLYNTON ARMS.

ALL the village was in a state of strange confusion on Christmas Eve, in spite of the perfect peace of the early portion of that day—peace of mind which urged the manifold preparations for the festive season to be carried on with alacrity; and an English country house, and the adjacent village, are usually festive at Christmas.

The “Bridlynton Arms” looks outside as if something of extraordinary nature were going on, for there are lights in all the windows, and the stables show unusual signs of life, also, for every stall is full. Messengers have been

despatched from various country seats, and they are waiting in the inn kitchen. Now and then a carriage, or other vehicle, is driven briskly past, and moves silently along the fallen snow, which has increased a little since the sun went down in the afternoon. The ponds and lake are silently encrusting with ice, and it is expected that intense cold, similar to that of a few years ago, is about to return.

The inn kitchen is very full, for besides the usual visitors at Christmas-tide, and the several messengers and grooms mentioned, many from the surrounding hamlets have walked over, for the excitement which prevailed in the village soon spread. A gamekeeper had been shot, and a care-taker fired at ; but beyond all that, the lady at the Hall lay dying.

Carriages drove by with neighbouring gentlemen, who were anxiously inquiring into the circumstances ; and the body of the murdered man was visited ; and the rural police were examined ; and voices were hushed that told of evil omens, and what one had said, and another expected, when the old swan died a year ago.

Plenty of strong ale was distributed meanwhile in the lightsome kitchen, and men sat drinking with a quiet, business-like manner, as if they felt that, a satisfactory manner of filling in the time. Ale in pitchers, or brown jugs, in pewter pots, or in tumblers, all foaming with fine October. In a richly-chased silver cup, Job Abbot, the Methodist preacher, thought well to take a look ; and as the landlord passed, he filled it up, and the high froth was blown aside by the Methodist ; but before he drank, he spoke some words of exhortation, to the effect that death in strange forms had been, and was still hovering near, and that it behoved men to watch.

And then, as all seemed disposed to listen, Job Abbot arose and preached a sermon, and interspersed his discourse with anecdotes, which repeated, might savour of the profane ; but the hearers took all as it was meant, and were soberly convinced of the truth. Now and then a smile, or even laughter, would come to the lips of the young stable-boys at the strange stories he told ; but it resolved itself into confusion, when the landlord or the landlady only

gave one look of reproof ; for they had much deference for the character of Abbot.

His similes were so strange, but his own conviction so full of power, that the Methodist preacher, though his doctrine was at fault—for he had no conception of the force of that word, neither did he obtain any mastery over the minds of the regular church-goers—had attentive listeners ; and all the people congratulated themselves upon their satisfaction at hearing Job talk—not quite aware that they were more diverted than they would have considered consistent with religious teaching ; and that the hours were passing quickly under his flow of words.

Grooms began to grow fidgety, whose masters were either up at the Hall, or gone to the large room where the body of the caretaker was lying—ready for the inquest. The gamekeeper was fast recovering the loss of blood, which only weakened him, no mortal part having been touched. He and his companion were walking together, when a gun was heard ; the gamekeeper could not tell whence it was fired, there were trees in all directions ;

his arm let fall his own gun, and he had walked some steps before he became aware that his friend had fallen.

The injuries to himself appeared by all investigation to have been accidental, or that the whole affair was a mistake. Who could have inflicted the wound, or who had a spite or ill-feeling against the other was never known.

The gamekeeper was a stranger, and had been so far carefully assisted in his duties by the neighbours, with whom he was on good terms. His preserves had not been interfered with, and his experience with regard to the breeding of pheasants and general care of game was undisputed, and poaching had been singularly rare during the last eighteen months.

The delinquent, whomsoever he might be, whether disappointed poacher or individual enemy, escaped, or passed through the country unrecognised and uncaptured, nor did suspicion fall upon any one.

Could the fallen man have spoken, he might very possibly have suggested the former gamekeeper, Henry Thorpe, whose short stay had

been one of mutual distrust and dislike ; but his skull was almost carried away by the contents of a gun, and his lips were for ever mute.

Every publicity was given to the facts, such as advertisements in the London and sporting papers, as well as at the local police-stations ; but, as no evidence and no suspicion were produced in aid, the whole proceedings were lost, and a veil of mystery fell, which was never lifted ; it was part of the fulfilment of the omens in the estimation of the old women, and a subject of much annoyance to the men, that such a crime could be committed in Christian England, and left unpunished.

Four o'clock on Christmas morning found the village inn still lighted up, but the drinkers had fallen into a variety of attitudes that would have suited an illustration of the story of the "Sleeping Beauty in the Enchanted Wood." Some slept on benches—hard enough their repose ; more, in uncomfortable positions on the floor ; some few with a cloak or rug under their heads—the rare cases of provident ones ; many with cheeks on the cold bricks.

Two, deeper in slumber than many who own a downy couch, were stretched at full length on the long tables, where they must have settled themselves with some degree of deliberation, for mugs and pipes, cups and pots, and little pools of liquor spilled, were untouched.

Grooms leaned against the wall, seated on the floor, where they fancied themselves ready, on a sudden call, to wake up in a moment.

Women, whose functions were to wash glasses and jugs, had sat up in curiosity and succumbed to the general quiet, and slept soundly; the low stools they had chosen had no support, and their heads had fallen on their knees, and the women slumbered in break-neck fashion. But Job Abbot did not yield to lethargy—he alone was watchful, and from time to time muttered some words which might be prayer or might be otherwise, as he looked on the assemblage of sleepers.

The landlady was there too, nodding her head in the corner-chair, which should have kept it steady, as it had a fine high back; her spouse could stand it no longer, and had retired and thrown himself upon his bed, all

dressed as he was, in coat, breeches, and gaiters ; his cap, having fallen from his head, lay by the bedside. Except himself, nobody meant to go to sleep—especially his wife, who made up the fire after midnight, and rolled her arms in her ample apron, to keep them warm whilst she waited for news from the Hall ; but the deep potation of many around her causing them to fall asleep, she caught the infection, and the weary rested. But the fire grew low, and the candles began to be one by one extinguished ; then Job Abbot woke them up—for he heard the sound of distant wheels, and the tramp of horses' hoofs in the silence of night without.

“That will be Dr. Hepworth's nag,” he said ; and in a moment one roused the other, and stiff, cold, and comfortless, they awoke and greeted each other with yawns, and, surprised themselves, sought to find what brought all here. It was not a cheerful greeting for Christmas morning.

CHAPTER II.

AT HEATHERSIDE RECTORY.

CHRISTMAS EVE at the Rectory came at last, for it had been a long anticipation on the part of the young people there, and a Christmas tree was burning brightly—that is, a tree was refulgent with lamps and tapers fastened securely, and no other light was required in the large apartment. The holly used for the purpose this year, in place of fir, was firmly fixed in a large tub some months ago, and watched and fondled by the children. It had to be decorated with extra berries, and long strings were threaded by the little ones, and hung in festoons about it, the whole presenting a very brilliant appearance.

Eight sons and daughters were around it, but the father and mother were gone to Brid-

lynton Hall, having heard of a sudden illness, and they hoped to be back in time to spend the evening with the family. Yule-tide was the signal for festivities at the Rectory, and Lady Alice having long ago given up keeping birthdays as too inconvenient in so large a household, made it a rule to present each member with something then.

"Shall we wait for mother, Edith?" asked a handsome youth of a sister.

"I scarcely know what to advise; what do you say, Charlie?"

"I really think," said Charlie, "we had better begin."

The said Charlie looked about three-and-twenty.

"Oh, wait a little longer, you elders," urged Roderick; "my mother prepared all the prizes herself, and I don't believe either Edith or Mary can carry out all her wishes."

"Bessie is rubbing her eyes already, Roderick," said another.

"Well, Tom, you are for beginning, I see?"

"I am," said Tom, "because I suspect

mother will be tired when she does come, and glad to find it all over."

"Don't you expect Lady Bridlynton will soon be better?" asked little Berta.

"None can tell, little woman," said Charlie. "Edith," he continued, "I believe Tom is right, he is a wiser fellow than any of us. Mother will be tired, so let us get it over, as he says."

"Carried unanimously," cried Roderick, taking Mary by the hand. "May we open?"

"Yes, if you like," said an elder girl; and they then drew back folding-doors and disclosed a long room, where the school-children and their mothers were quietly waiting for their tea. A long-continued "Oh!" was the only sound for some seconds; they were too much enchanted at the vision of the tree to say more. Charlie went forward and said,—

"My friends, something terrible has happened at Bridlynton Park; my father was sent for, and my mother felt it was her duty to go with him, so in their absence we must do the best we can, and beg of you to be satisfied with us young ones as substitutes;

we will do our best to give you a pleasant evening."

"Thank you, sir; God bless your kind hearts, we are all glad to see Mr. Charles amongst his own again," said several mothers, and others echoed the good wishes.

Such was the opening chorus, and there was no more silence; tongues were unlocked, and a continuous chatter kept up during tea, and much cake and many buns were despatched.

The fat, comely cook plied her kettles at a blazing fire till her face became as ruddy as the coals which gave intense heat. The housemaids and a page were carrying the scalding fluid, and Roderick, Mary, Berta, and Bessie occupied in helping everybody.

Then came the dismantling of the Christmas-tree with its wealth of toys and bonbons, and the table on which had reposed since yesterday parcels directed to the women, containing flannel, cotton prints, aprons, ribbons, sugar, tea, and indescribable things.

Prayer-books for some from the Rector, other books, tops, whips, knives for the brothers of the school-children, for the boys

came in later to hear the music ; they having been refreshed at the school-house.

Edith and Clara took it in turn to play the organ, and some fine pieces were performed by the young Somertons and the village choir, all practised and arranged beforehand ; then followed farewells and kind wishes, and next a hurrying over the frozen snow, the stars shining down upon the guests who were leaving the Rectory too well warmed and in too good spirits to care about the cold.

"What a pity mamma was not here," said Mary.

"And Dr. Hepworth," said Clara.

"It is a pity," said Charlie, "for they missed a treat, and we missed them. I vote now that the junior members of this establishment depart in peace to their several couches for the night."

"Yes, I think so too," said Clara. "You know, Tom, we have left mother's own children for to-morrow."

"Then there is another table ?" said a little one, with glistening eyes.

"Yes, mother has something for each of us,

but I do not like to interfere with that table ; we have left it quite untouched."

"She will like that better," said Tom. "Good-night Edith and Clara, and everybody," said he, setting an example which the others followed.

"Good-night, Charlie," the younger girls said, for the brother was very dear, and seemed the well-beloved of each.

They were scarcely gone, when Clara burst into tears. "I am very miserable about mamma," she said ; "she ought not to be out at night ; she is not strong."


"She may remain to sleep at the Hall," suggested Edith.

"Worse and worse ; she cannot bear much excitement, and does not rest well from home ; I do so wish she were come back."

"Would you like me to go and inquire about matters ?" asked Charlie.

"No ; I feel so nervous. I could not bear you to go away ; and as there are two ways to Bridlynton, you would be sure to miss them on the road, and that would be dreadful."

"My dear Clara, you are very tired. I should



like to ask you to go to bed, too, and leave Edith and me to put things to rights here. Do go, Clara."

"I suppose I am tired, for I am not given to cry, but to-night I feel so wretched ; and as I have to take the organ to-morrow, I will go to bed, Charlie, on condition that you ask papa to come up when they come home."

"Certainly ; I promise. So, go to bed like a dear, good girl, and sleep soundly till he awakes you."

Clara dried her face, and, kissing brother and sister, left them.

Charlie put out the superabundant lights, and then sat down with Edith, whilst the servants arranged the furniture in the rooms.

Midnight tolled out from the old church tower ; a sigh and a moan from the wind broke upon the silence of the night ; there was something sorrowful which sounded in the stillness from the trees,—a wailing monotony, that acted on the spirits.

Edith put down her book.

"Charlie, I think they will not come back

to-night. Suppose we send the servants to bed; they ought not to be wearied, for to-morrow they will have much to do."

"That is true. What will my father do about the early service in the morning?"

"That is it. I fancy he must still come home. I am getting very uneasy, Charlie."

"Edith, you shall lie on the sofa, and I will fetch my coat and a cloak from the hall to cover you. Try to sleep, and I will settle the servants."

To please her brother Edith submitted. It was pleasant to lie down and be covered snugly with his great coat, and she meant to rest; but she could only listen to the sigh and wail of the night wind, which would be heard, with tones as plaintive as those played on an *Æolian* harp. So she kept watching and fearing lest wheels might approach amidst the moaning without her hearing them.

Charles induced everybody to go to bed except the cook and Ben, cook declaring,—

"Mr. Charles, you see my puddings are all ready, and greater beauties never were made, —both my parlour pudding and my other, sir;

and my mince-pies are just ready,—only to be made hot. The turkeys are trussed and stuffed, the beef ready to go down, and even the vegetables washed. I have nothing, sir, to lie on my mind, so just allow me to sit with Ben ; and if your dear mamma returns, she will be glad of somebody to give her something nice and hot, sir ; and if she is the same mother as left you all, she will return, if it's five o'clock first, sooner than be away for Christmas Day, Mr. Charles."

"So, Ben, you mean to do all when they come ?"

"Yes, Mr. Charles. The phaeton horse, he knows me as well as he does Sam ; and the master, he will want nothing only to get to bed ; and cook, she has the candles ready for instant lighting ; and Jane, she made up the fire, sir, in the mistress's room, sir, before she went to bed."

"Then I will go back to Miss Somerton, Ben."

"All right, sir."

Charlie sat by the fire, listening to the pitiful wind, and hoping Edith slept, for she was very quiet.

Ben and the cook in the kitchen dozed for some minutes, not quite seeming to understand the whole affair, and the quiet which reigned by that seldom quiet hearth.

“Dear me, Ben ! there’s half-past one chiming. What can be the matter ?”

“We shall see in the morning, Martha.”

“Gracious me ! will they come to-night, Ben ?”

“I don’t know ; but if they come, night or morning, somebody must let them in.”

“Surely. I wish, Ben, this wasn’t Christmas Eve.”

“Why ?”

“It seems such an unlucky time for master and mistress to be away like this.”

“Many a thing happens on Christmas Eve, just the same as other eves ; but it’s going on for Christmas Day now.”

“Yes ; and none of the waits been round, Ben !”

“I expect it’s the ‘Bridlynton Arms’ done that.”

“How ?—kept them out of consideration to the sick lady ?”

•

"Not a bit of it—kept them to amuse themselves with. I heard there are twenty or thirty strangers there."

"The wind's finely gone down, Ben."

"Yes ; I dare say it's snowing again."

"Dear me ! I wonder if it is, now ?"

"Well, we can soon see that," said Ben, as he opened a portion of the kitchen shutter, and held a candle to the window, so that Martha might see a white line on the narrow woodwork of every pane.

Hold !—a start !—a report of a pistol !—the candle is out ! The bar of the shutter fell from the man's hand. The air rushed in through the aperture in the glass which the ball had made.

Ben replaced the shutter, and barred it. Martha sat panting on a low stool. Charles and Edith came hurriedly.

"What was that, Ben ?"

"I cannot tell, sir ; I trust no more than a foolish trick."

Clara and young Roderick followed—Clara, white as ashes, clinging to her brother, whose face was red as hers was white ; her feet were

bare ; so were Roderick's : he had dragged a blanket round him in his haste.

"Edith, Charles, he is gone round to the front !" gasped Clara.

"Who, my darling ?"

"Oh ! some one, so tall. I saw him quite distinctly."

"Who can it be ?" said Charles.

"I will run up to the tower," said Roderick.
"We shall know then which way he goes ; one can see a long way now, because of the snow."

"Do. I will go with you. Girls, huddle together by the kitchen fire with Martha," said Charles.

"No use going, Mr. Roderick," said Ben, placing chairs for the young ladies.

"Will he fire in here again ?" asked Clara.

"Oh no, Miss. I'm not going to look out again to-night."

From the tower the brothers saw a dark form move over the fields towards the railway station at Berning, on towards the second avenue, if Bridlynton were considered.

"What a pity it snows, Charlie ! There will be no trace of him in the morning."

"I am glad he is not on the main road, lest he might take it into his head to frighten mother."

"Don't you think she is gone to bed, Charlie? Surely there is room enough at Bridlynton."

"I trust she may, but I fancy my father will come,—and they took the basket phaeton. Oh! Roderick, there is the pistol again; I am sure of it."

"Ought we to follow that man, Charles?"

"I do not see what good it could do; and the girls would be worse frightened if we left the house."

"Oh! come down, Charlie; we are so terrified without you!" said Clara's voice from the bottom of the stairs.

"Hush! do not wake the others; we are coming." And they descended the turret quickly.

"Clara, do pray either dress or go back to bed," said Edith. "You will take cold."

"I am too miserable to take cold. I am so unhappy about mamma."

"Come, let us go back to the kitchen again,

and get Martha to make us a cup of tea," Edith said, as she led the way, and gave a warm shawl to her sister.

Martha and Ben were whispering mysteriously together.

CHAPTER III.

A CHRISTMAS GIFT.

THE church was more richly decked with emblems than ever, and Christmas Day broke upon it ; but never before was so small a gathering of communicants on Christmas morning since Mr. Somerton came.

The organ, too, was mute ; and they usually had a good voluntary and something played during the offertory at the early service, but this day no melody called forth praise.

Mrs. Skipton entered the church and proceeded to her usual sitting without noticing anything particular. She needed the influence of the House of God to calm her spirit, which was wondrously perturbed ; but she knelt and prayed, and found relief and peace.

Her summons to the table came, and then it

occurred to her how soon her turn had arrived, and that but one of the Rector's family was present with him.

When he gave her the cup his eyes for an instant met hers, and what a world of sorrow was in them !—deep, sunken, agonised woe was the expression they bore, but under too powerful restraint to break forth.

The last prayer finished, and the blessing pronounced, all prepared to leave the edifice ; but there was not the recognition in the porch, nor the pleasant greetings of other years. Each passed on into the outer air, for it was barely light, and, in spite of the snow, a leaden aspect hung over everything ; dark clouds made a cheerless, wintry look on the sky ; and the trees, bare and leafless, looked most desolate, as they stood out against it.

Mrs. Skipton waited at the Rector's little private door on the other side from the church-yard ; something she saw was wrong, and she knew he would not like to be questioned, so she went round to protect him, and waited till she heard him coming. He held out his hand.

“ Oh, Mrs. Skipton ! ” was all he said.

"May I go with you?"

"Do."

They walked side by side silently, the tread upon the snow jarring on the nerves of each.

Virginia knew nothing of the events that had occurred last night either at the rectory or at Bridlynton, but that face of sorrow bade her go and help somebody.

She walked beside the Rector up the long avenue, and at the steps no one came to meet papa—a wonder.

He entered by his study-door; she followed.

"What is it, Mr. Somerton?"

"My poor girls. Go to them."

She left him, took off her thick boots on the mat at his door, and placed her shawl and bonnet on a chair in the entrance-hall; she had a neat, close cap, which she wore beneath the bonnet.

The drawing-room was empty, and the dining-room, and no voices told her where the young ones were.

She began to ascend the stairs. Charlie opened the door of his mother's room, and met her.

"Oh, Mrs. Skipton!" he said, like his father.

Up, up again, to the old nursery, where the young ones were sitting at a scrambling sort of breakfast at the hands of servants, who placed things on the table, and waited on them, looking through their tears.

"Where are your sisters, Mr. Charles?"

"With my mother. I will fetch Clara."

"No, tell me something yourself. Good morning, children. Happy Christmas to you," she said; but the pained faces turned to hers with no words reciprocal.

"Will you stay with us?" Mary asked, as Mrs. Skipton was about to leave the room with Charles.

"I will; I will stay all day, so eat your breakfast."

Outside the door they met nurse Meriton, an old favourite and retainer, who had nursed the elder portion of the family, and had been a maid to Lady Alice before she married "Rector Somerton," as she called him. She was not weeping now, but sobbing, and Charlie had to urge her to control herself, when she became as collected as usual.

"Tell Mrs. Skipton about it, nurse," said Charles.

Virginia followed to nurse's own little sitting-room.

"You see, dear," she began—"Come in, Mr. Charles too, pray do, it will rest you to sit here a few minutes." And the young man did as she desired, and nurse went on crying again, so he said, "Lady Bridlynton died about five this morning, and my mother was so anxious to come home, but a shot was fired at the basket phaeton, which alarmed her. I must go, indeed, Mrs. Skipton."

"Lady Bridlynton is dead, then?"

"Yes, and so suddenly. You go on, nurse." And he left the room, and Mrs. Meriton continued: "I cannot think it is all right; but they told the doctor she had heart complaint."

"But your mistress, nurse?"

"Ah! my dear mistress! The fright, added to the loss of rest, and all the exertions she made yesterday, have been too much. She is as ill as she can be; but the Lord's arm is strong."

"Who is with her?"

"Nurse Jones was sent for immediately, and Dr. Hepworth too; but he can do nothing."

"Can I do anything, Mrs. Meriton?"

"Stay, dear, and comfort the ladies, and Mr. Charles."

"Do you think Lady Alice will live?"

"No, I do not—I dare not hope; she has undergone so much, and is no longer the strong young woman of former times. She cannot bear it, I fear."

"Oh! nurse, such a Christmas Day!"

"I am sorry for poor master, and he can get no one to help him."

"Mr. Benyon could lend a curate."

"What! all the way from Fordingbridge?"

"Why not? if we send a conveyance for him."

Some stir below called their attention. Virginia passed Edith on the stairs without notice on either side. A strange doctor was in the hall. Mrs. Skipton went to the study-door and knocked.

"Come in," said the Rector.

"I am going to send to Fordingbridge, if you will allow me, for one of Mr. Benyon's curates; there is time enough."

Mr. Somerton raised his head and said, "Do;" then resumed his former attitude.

She wrote a note at his table, and took it at once to the yard, and despatched a servant with a horse and gig for the curate, then returned to the house shoeless still, but sought a housemaid, and got shoes and stockings, for she saw her thoughtful head might be of use in aiding all parties at the sorrowful Rectory.

Mr. Somerton had, with the kindness which was especially his own, sent his curate, Marcus Lyne, to spend Christmas with his family, knowing that it would this year give intense pleasure, as a married sister and young brothers were to be at home.

Virginia Skipton, having dry stockings and somebody's shoes, returned to the study.

"Have you had breakfast?"

"Oh!—No!"

In a quarter of an hour she, bearing a tray, was at his side again. Strong coffee, a rasher of ham, an egg, and some dry toast were there.

"You must eat this, Mr. Somerton, and God bless you."

"Have you heard how she is?"

"No; but the new doctor is still with her, and Dr. Hepworth."

"God grant she may be spared!"

"Drink your coffee."

"I cannot."

"Try."

He drank it.

"Now eat."

He began to do so.

She then said, "You must lie down here on that sofa till church time. I will come and tell you in good time, for you to be ready; but your being strong is important, and one cannot be up all night without feeling it."

He closed his eyes, as if to shut out something terrible, and tried to take comfort within.

"Send Charlie to me."

"I will. Keep quiet."

Mrs. Skipton sought Charles, and found him and Roderick in the parlour.

"Your father wants you;" and Charlie went.

"I am so glad," said Roderick; "he dared not intrude, but Charlie will comfort my father."

"What ails your mother, Roderick?"

“Did no one tell you?—A confinement case; I think she is in great danger.”

“They told me of fright, but I did not hear the rest—even Mrs. Meriton did not explain.”

“Do not leave us, Mrs. Skipton.”

“Certainly not. Will you go to our house and tell Gervase where I am, and why, and send Jenny, to whom I must speak; and she can bring my dressing things, and all the servants here are too busy to run about on messages.”

“I will go with pleasure, and offer to dine with Mr. Skipton, if you like—only promise to send for me in time;” and his eyes filled with tears.

“No, dear good boy; you shall all be here this sad Christmas Day. Put on your hat and go at once, for church time is drawing near.”

One by one, as she could get them, or in pairs, Mrs. Skipton induced the elder girls and Charles to get their breakfast, and then the bells began to ring out, for the hour of service was approaching.

Clara sat down beside Virginia, and took her hand, “How very good you are; we could not

get on without you. They say mamma is easier. I believe the shot we heard was fired at papa."

"Fired at your father?"

"Yes, by a tall person. I saw the tall man, who fired in at our kitchen window, and Charles went to the tower and saw him cross the country by the fields; he thought he was going to the railway, but at the Nine Elm turn he must have stopped, for he was standing there when papa and mamma were driving home after Lady Bridlynton died."

"Did they recognise him?"

"Oh no! he is some tramp or burglar, perhaps; I should know his face again, I am sure—but yet I could not describe him."

"Where did you see him, Clara?"

"From my bedroom window. I heard the shot he had fired into the kitchen, and sprung from my bed. He lighted his pipe; I saw this from my window, for he struck a match, and, whilst standing to do so, I saw his face distinctly."

"Did any one follow him?"

"No; Ben thought it was some foolish joke

to alarm us on Christmas Eve ; he and Martha chatted together, but Ben did not go out, and would not let Charlie, after he had seen him cross the fields. Papa drove home that way—the Nine Elm way, I mean—for he thought the horse would have surer footing ; but we usually come by the other avenue, only the snow made papa change.”

“ And the man fired at your father ? ”

“ He fired at him, I suppose ; he came up so close, that dear mamma, seeing the pistol, snatched the whip and threw up his arm. This made him miss his aim ; the bullet whizzed between them. The man said something to papa, but mamma only heard a voice ; she told Edith she had no power to understand, only it sounded like a threat, and the word ‘ Christmas ’ she caught, and then fainted, and was carried into the house in that state.”

Mrs. Skipton thought of the vagrant two years ago, who had promised her to return ; but she had not time now for much consideration, except for the poor children. She was very gentle and thoughtful for all the long day through, but asked no more questions, nor

seemed to sympathise with Tom that the miscreant, for whom search was made, could not be found.

A curate came to help Mr. Somerton, and the service was got through without difficulty ; but people seemed to be much taken up with the death at Bridlynton and the sickness at Heatherside.

Christmas dinners were sent home to the children of the school, whose mothers duly came to the offices and went away quietly ; and after that it snowed again till a curtain of white veiled everything,—tree, and hedge, and road, footpath and garden-walks all alike.

The doctors both remained and dined—Mrs. Skipton presided ; the Rector could not face his family, but took his post beside his wife's pillow meantime. Husband and wife were for that hour once more all in all, and words were spoken for each other only. She talked of her children and their future ; of the accident, and implored him to take no steps concerning it. He promised anything, if she could only be quiet, and give him hope. The doctors found her tranquil and let her enjoy her husband's

presence. She wanted no one else, she said; but terrible weakness followed, and, after prostration, some delirium.

Mrs. Skipton was sure the man who had caused the terror was the same who bade her good-bye till Christmas that morning she had described to Gervase.

Christmas Day was drawing to a close, when Lady Alice said, with a strong voice,—

“Mrs. Skipton, please ring the bell for nurse to tell Charlie, and all of them, to come at once.”

“Dear lady,” urged Dr. Hepworth, “it cannot be.”

“I must see them all; it will be a comfort to them in days to come. Call them now.”

Charlie came first. He fondly took his mother’s hand and spoke soothingly to her. The girls, worn out with agitation, were summoned from the schoolroom, whither they had retreated with the little ones.

“My Charlie, my son, you will have much on your hands.”

“Do not talk, mother, you may soon be better.” He stooped and kissed her. No

tongue can tell or pen describe Charlie's love for his mother.

"You must mind Roderick and Tom, and all my girls, Charlie, and your dear, dear father."

Edith and Clara, though nearly as old, were not, in her estimation, her mainstay like Charlie, though she trusted them wholly, and loved them tenderly. Charlie was her first-born, and had always been her friend and greatest hope, as regards the younger ones.

The girls came. No crying this time. They kissed her lovingly, and thought her better, then passed out with Mrs. Skipton. Roderick, Tom, Mary, Berta, and Bessie kissed their mother, and said Good-night.

It was a long, weary, quiet, sad evening—neither books nor conversation could beguile the sorrow which was hovering over the rectory. Tea-time passed, and one by one the party diminished: for the young give way to sleepiness and fatigue.

The church clock struck midnight, and, in half an hour after, the passing bell rolled with a solemn sound, booming out upon the night

air forty-three times—for it is the custom in some English villages to toll out the age of the deceased ; and the soul of Alice Somerton had taken flight. A tiny, tiny son, whose existence hung on a thread for many weeks, was ushered into the world.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS STILL.

It was three o'clock on the morning of the next day, when Mrs. Skipton went home, Ben walking beside her, the faithful fellow blinded with tears ; he had a lantern, and she a key to open her own gate, but Gervase sprung to the door.

“ Well, Virginia ? ”

“ I thought you would be waiting for me when you heard the bell ! Good-night, Ben ; thank you.”

“ So another friend is gone ? ”

“ Another friend is gone—poor Lady Alice ! ”

“ And in the midst of happiness.”

“ Yes ; such as very few enjoy. So good a husband as hers is very rare indeed, and such devoted, excellent children ! ”

"How about the Christmas presents?"

"Not given yet."

It has been said Mr. Skipton acted presiding genius, and Lady Alice got him to obtain from London every present she set her kind heart upon as most likely to please her children.

"Virginia, this is very sad."

"Very sad. Lady Alice left another present, of which you know nothing."

"Another present!—to whom?"

"To Mr. Somerton,—to all of us,—another son,—a little creature,—cast prematurely on his fate."

"Oh! he will do well enough; Charles will be his guardian. Poor Mr. Somerton, what will he do?"

"He is a good man; it is a hard trial."

"You are very tired, my wife."

"Very, and very sorrowful."

"You will go to bed now?"

"Oh yes; I must get some sleep; then arrange things for you, and go to the rectory for a week, I think, to see about matters, and help them all."

One need not attempt to describe the grief; it was a sad awaking next morning to find the mother gone.

Charlie and Mary were the two to soothe the others. Edith and Clara trembled at the future.

"That little baby; how shall we manage?"

"He is such a darling," said Mary; "we shall treasure him: he will be such a pleasure. Do let us call him 'Harrold'; it is such a beautiful name."

Mrs. Skipton, who was with them at breakfast, started at the name.

"You must ask papa to choose a name," she said.

"We can ask him, and add another; but in all my games I used to think that name so beautiful. Charlie, will you call baby Harrold?"

"I do not know, Mary. My father will arrange."

Rich and poor were in trouble for the double loss to the neighbourhood; for Bridlynton Park was not so distant but that the death of the two ladies was felt as one blow—two in affluence,

and two stricken in the midst of apparently such circumstances as make life dear, with every comfort surrounding of kindred and possession.

The doctors watched the infant.

"I think he will live," said one.

"I think not," said the other.

"The master should christen him," said Nurse Meriton. And so, lest the frail bark, so hastily launched, should vanish without a name or title to Christendom, the Rector assembled his family to witness the ceremony.

Mrs. Skipton held the baby.

"What shall we call him?"

"Oh! Harrold, papa," said Mary.

"What do you say, Charlie?"

"Anything you like, father — your own name."

"No; she did not choose it for you or the others. Let it be something she would like."

"What do you approve, father?"

The infant gave a little, weak sound—so faint that it produced remembrance of its extreme frailty.

Mr. Somerton proceeded with the baptismal

service, having named two godfathers, and Mrs. Skipton godmother.

“Name the child.”

Virginia looked at Charlie: he said “Harrold,” as if no other name could come to his recollection; and the priest, forgetful of the father, and bereaved husband, took the white package on his arm, and made a sign on its forehead, saying, with a firm voice,—

“Harrold, I baptise thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, &c., and sign thee with the sign of the cross, in token,” &c.

Clara then took the little creature to Mrs. Jones, who had repudiated the proposal that it should be carried to the church and christened at the font. “It would die,” she said, “in the snow, and had no right even to go down-stairs to the breakfast-room,” where the ceremony was performed.

Nurse Jones laid the child in his soft cradle, and four days after he yet lived, and Clara said to Edith,—

“Don’t you think papa ought to open those

parcels whilst mamma is still with us, for the boys will like it better?"

They spoke to him.

"As you will, my daughters. Let Charlie do it."

"It was a struggle and an effort; but they felt some of the sweetness would be wanting if the mother were removed before those sealed papers were opened, so Charlie gave forth the Christmas presents.

His own was a book he had longed for; but as he was at college he thought it too expensive to ask for. "How she knew my inmost thoughts!" was his ejaculation.

Each received the very thing they had most wished for. Their mother's last words to each were those of an appropriate verse from the Holy Scriptures, written in a note, and placed within each book, or box, or desk, in an envelope. She did not approve of writing texts in the fly-leaf, which might be irreverently read by a stranger.

Mary sank, weeping, into a chair over her box of water colours.

"Oh! what a mother we have lost!"

The household servants had each a trifle ; but they put away their ribbons and collars with tears, saying,—

“ We would rather have had her to work for.”

Next came the preparations for putting that large household into mourning. Mrs. Skipton was everywhere wise and useful ; she knew exactly how much Paramatta, crape, cashmere, and silk everyone required, and how to write to the tailors for clothes for the boys.

On the morning of the funeral she went home for an hour, and returned in a black dress, with the usual “ Cardinal ” cape, and a trimming of crape and large buttons covered with the same material, ornaments of jet, and a head-dress of suitable form and materials for her peculiar taste and figure.

Nobody found fault with her appearance, and the tall, gaunt figure was kindly welcomed as she walked up the approach. Bessie and Berta met her at the door, and her kind eyes beamed with a friendly smile, grateful to the poor children.

The miserable hour arrived, and the tolling

bell broke upon all with a sad solemnity they had not even yet experienced—the mother must now go from them for ever.

Charlie looked on in blank despair.

Mr. Benyon had come over to read the funeral service, as Mr. Somerton was to follow his wife with his children and the other mourners, who had put on cloaks and hoods with silent sorrow.

Youthful and aged, all too full of woe to speak.

The procession moved towards the church, and there, when the long line ceased to move, it was joined by Lord Bridlynton, whose carriage drove up in time; he returned only the night before from the south of France, and joined the family in token of respect.

No one sobbed like Mr. Skipton; kind-hearted, good, excellent Gervase seemed to feel for all that company of mourners so acutely; they stood with calmer faces, but so pallid, that Virginia was quite alarmed, when they re-entered the house where no more Lady Alice's voice would greet them.

Marcus Lyne returned as soon as he heard

of his rector's distress, but Mr. Benyon took the next Sunday's duty, and a week after Tom had to leave for school, Roderick for Woolwich, and Charlie went back to Cambridge.

Edith and Clara went on with everything as much in the usual manner as possible, having Mrs. Skipton to refer to on emergencies.

Constance remained away, for she knew it would only renew their grief to have her come back to Heatherside at present, since she was not asked to go to the rectory, Edith being old enough to arrange all for the little ones, and she took her mother's place at table with a sad heart.

Mary, who never wanted a spur, helped with Bessie and Berta; but Clara could not assist much; housekeeping was an effort to her, and she never could feel interest in butchers' books and household bills. The school wearied her extremely, but she tried to visit it, and did it but badly. Mr. Lyne saw she hated it, and kindly said,—

“Pray allow me to take your share of the work at present, Miss Somerton, I can visit the girls before I go to the boys.”

"If you could," she said, her eyes filling with tears. "I suppose I am not well, for the voices jar upon me, and I feel quite to wonder how mamma ever bore the air and discomfort of a girl's school."

"Do not try to go till you are stronger. You might visit some of the people with your father. The walking or driving would be good for you."

"If papa would let me!"

"I think he would; he is going to Bridlynton to-day. Will you drive with him?"

"Thank you; if papa will allow me, I will."

From that time Clara often drove with her father, or, more often still, drove him. It did her good; the school worried her; the mistress took advantage of the dislike which she evinced to teaching, and Mr. Lyne was right in persuading her not to go, as she did more harm than good.

Clara drove well, and the fresh air brought some of the roses back to her cheeks; and it was good for Mr. Somerton to have her, and in the end these drives led to new hopes and pleasant results.

CHAPTER V.

SHIPWRECKED.

MR. SKIPTON handed "The Times" to his wife one day. "Look at that, Virginia."

She read—"The man who committed the Bank robbery, and made his escape from the Albert Prison, has been recaptured, Messrs. Cornish and Co. having accurately described him. He is a tall, finely-made man, with small hands, and of gentleman-like appearance; his language would denote a higher class than that of a common sailor, which he professes to be, and he gives his name Thomas Brading, one of the crew driven in at Cardiff as rescued from the unfortunate emigrant vessel, 'The Golden Empire.' It is suspected that the name may be an alias, but we understand he is likely to suffer penal servitude for life."

"He is the same who was at our side-door, Gervase, in the court-yard two years ago."

"I think so, indeed."

"People are annoyed, Gervase, that Mr. Somerton can say so little about the man who fired at him ; but it was only the poor wife saw him."

"No matter, it is just as well."

Mrs. Meriton was announced. She came in with a curtsey.

"Mr. Skipton, I hope you will pardon me, sir, for intruding."

"Pray be seated, Mrs. Meriton."

"How are the young ladies, nurse?" asked Virginia, thinking to reassure her.

"Quite well, madam ; and I beg you will excuse my liberty in calling upon you, but Ben and Martha have given me the 'Fordingbridge Mercury,' which has a curious paragraph."

"It was copied from 'The Times,' said Mr. Skipton,—“no, that could not be.” He read it ; it was to the same effect, but more lengthy, as suited to a provincial paper.

"May I tell you what we think, sir?"

"Pray do."

"Ben thinks this man is the same who fired into our kitchen, sir, and also at the master."

"I think so too."

"Thank God," said Virginia, "that he is taken! It would have distressed Mr. Somerton to have to appear against him——"

"And don't you think, madam, he may have done the terrible deed at the park?"

"What, killed the care-taker there?"

"You see, madam, he may be insane; and I am, in my own mind, persuaded that Lady Bridlynton must have got some fright."

"What do you mean?"

"That the same man may have frightened her too."

"That is not for us to judge. It is possible. It would be cruel to put more horrors upon the man; but he is recaptured, and we need not inquire further, as he will not escape again," said Mr. Skipton.

"Vengeance is not in our hands," added his wife.

"Amen!" said nurse Meriton. "I thought it my duty, sir, to tell you what Martha and Ben

said, and I could not speak on the subject to the master."

"You are quite right; it is only presumptive evidence, after all. Penal servitude for life is not a light punishment for any crime, and it is not for us to do more. Good-morning, Mrs. Meriton.'

And the faithful nurse returned to her charge.

It has been said that Mr. Somerton walked to visit at Bridlynton Park the day before Christmas, and left to walk home. He had promised to have early tea in the schoolroom with his children before the evening performance. He walked very quickly on leaving the house, that he might reach Heatherside as early as he could to visit some of the poor, who would expect him.

Whilst yet in the domain, he met a sweep, and fancying the man looked hungry, put a shilling into his hand, saying, with a smile,—

"I don't throw shillings away, but I think you want one at this season, for your employment will be rare."

The man looked strangely, but thanked him, and passed on.

"Poor fellow, I have hurt his feelings," thought the Rector ; and then he smiled again over the sweep's feelings ; and it crossed his mind whether the man would console himself with beer, or give the shilling to his wife to buy tea. He soon reached Heatherside, where the women and girls accepted his shillings without hesitation, and would have accepted any amount for tea.

The sweep applied for the pleasure of cleaning the chimneys of Bridlynton House, and was denied with glowing indignation ; the maids assuring him he must be crazed to think they would be troubled with cleaning chimneys at such a season.

Repulsed, he betook himself to the road again ; but he had attained his object, namely, to find out whether her ladyship was at home.

By some means he made himself decent—where or how was known only to himself, for no one had seen that the sweep and Lady Bridlynton's visitor were one ; he effected some exchange of apparel, it is supposed ; his face was clean, at any rate, and he appeared again

as a sort of respectable messenger, with a note.

"I am to give this into her ladyship's own hands," he said, displaying a white envelope at the great hall door.

"Shall I say who it is from?" asked the butler.

"No, sir, I was to deliver it to my lady herself."

The butler looked. The parcel was light-looking and square. He concluded it must be some fragile performance wrought by lady fingers as an offering at the festive time that would not bear rough handling—that it was, in fact, a fashionable Christmas-box. The butler made Lady Bridlynton aware of the case, and he desired the messenger to bear his precious fancy concern into the library.

The butler saw him make a deep obeisance as he closed the door.

"Harrold!"

"Shipwrecked, Harriet. Hardships of all kinds. Shipwrecked literally and metaphorically, as one says."

"Why did you come?"

"It is the last time."

"Harrold !"

"I cannot stay in England. I am hunted down, and may be tracked at any moment. I am starving, but cannot face the servants."

He looked ill and aged, and travel-worn, in fact. Lady Bridlynton said,—

"I will bring food to the laurel walk."

"No ; into the holly path."

"Yes, if you prefer it."

"Hide this paper, and let me go without seeing that keen-eyed butler, if you can."

She opened the door, and crossed the hall with him, saying, rather loudly,—

"Mind you do not lose the note," and at the door she stood whilst he opened it. A footman appeared just as the wide doors closed upon him, and no one suspected anything.

Lady Bridlynton must get food, and how ? In her own house, where plenty reigned—but profusion was the order of the season. She said, "Get me a basket, and fill it with cold meat or fowl, some bread, and a flask of wine or brandy." The servant brought it, when she came in with her bonnet on, saying,—

"It is not my habit to give to mendicants, but I told a poor woman yesterday I would meet her to-day."

She felt so humbled, as to explain to her servant, it was so new for her to carry her basket with food, that he said,—

"Shall I go with you to carry it, my lady?"

"Oh no!" she said, quickly, and so much was going on below, that it created no further remarks or trouble.

Lady Oakbury took but a short walk, and then returned to finish her book, and a piece of work which was for her hostess.

She sat with her work and book by the fire in the wide grate in the drawing-room.

"How dark it is for half-past three," she said. "I must ring for a lamp, or go to my own room."

Whilst yet trying to work some finishing stitches, there came a sensation that some person's eyes were fixed on her intently—a feeling we have, without knowing whence it comes. Looking in at her by the great window was the messenger described. She recognised his figure under all the disguise—the hands, and

the eyes, which met hers as he walked rapidly away. She thought no more of a lamp, but book and work both dropped ; and Elfie sat brooding over early years and hopes, and grew moody and miserable over the firelight.

Whilst yet alone in a ruminating and unhappy frame of mind, Lady Bridlynton tapped at the window ; something in her face told a horrible tale. Without words, she flew to unclasp the window ; the lady stepped in out of the snow and cold.

“Elfie, I have heart complaint.”

Lady Oakbury gazed at her, and felt as if the blood in her veins were freezing or curdling with horror. There she stood, so haggard and changed, that her auditress was transfixed with fear, Lady Bridlynton looked at her so earnestly.

“Elfie,” she said, “if I die to-night, I look to you to befriend me. Mind, I have heart complaint, and the greatest aversion to anything like examination.” She sank, as if fainting, into a chair.

Elfie was going to ring the bell.

“No ; wait a moment. Once more, Lady



Oakbury, I do conjure you, let no one touch me. I am sure—I feel it—I shall die to-night. Give me your word, on your woman's honour, that you only will be with me to the last, and see that I am, without a moment's needless delay, placed in a shell, in the dress I now wear. Sheridan Oakbury, do you promise?"

Stunned and astonished, Elfie had listened in silence. "I do," she said, solemnly; then rang violently.

"We must carry her up-stairs—complaint of the heart—call Justine! Send for Mr. Somerton, and the doctor." These directions were jerked out, as servants, one by one, appeared, by Lady Oakbury.

Lady Bridlynton looked livid and calm.

Elfie spoke with spasmodic gasps. Each person she named was sent for. The tale was soon told, that Lady Bridlynton was dying. The servants said she had walked too far in the intense cold, and they told of her having carried out bread and meat to some poor woman. No appearance of the actual truth came to light.

Justine knew little of her mistress' *vie intime*

—the other maids nothing ; they obeyed Lady Oakbury, and the bonnet and warm shawl only were removed, and Elfie herself cut open the clothing over the chest, that nothing might impede respiration.

“No undressing,” she whispered ; “just as I am.”

“I have promised,” said poor Elfie.

The abigails came and went, for the housekeeper was weeping and wringing her hands at the confusion the sad events created ; and news crept in that a tragedy had occurred at a distant portion of the park, and hurrying grooms and messengers ran over one another in the yard, and Dr. Hepworth was arrested to look at the murdered care-taker, and to send for his assistant, occupied some time—for the gamekeeper ; whose wound was bleeding, but not serious.

The Rector had arrived, and was beside Lady Bridlynton ; and Lady Alice and Elfie sat together in the next room, when Dr. Hepworth was announced.

He asked some questions of Lady Oakbury, who professed that disease of the heart was an

acknowledged ailment with her friend, who was rapidly sinking—so rapidly that the doctor saw it would be useless to weary her with stimulants or remedies ; and, having felt her pulse, he gave way to Mr. Somerton, who offered words to ease and soothe the dying woman by prayer.

Hour after hour elapsed, a lethargy set in, which he knew would be followed by death. Lady Oakbury was in mute misery, but never left the bedroom and adjoining dressing-room. Mr. Somerton was called upon by the magistrates in their investigation as to the subject of the wounded gamekeeper, and visited the dead body of the care-taker ; but he knew nothing. And Lady Alice was lying on the sofa in the drawing-room at Bridlynton, waiting for him, and lamenting that she could do nothing.

She joined the party, however, in the chamber, and, with Elfie, partook of the sacrament of Christ's last supper—the table, with its pure white linen, the chalice, the wine, and bread,—all the symbols sinking into her heart.

Lady Bridlynton appeared to sleep ; that is, the brain was inactive for a long time, then a

spasm passed over her features ; she tried to move. Lady Oakbury took her hand ; she spoke with pain.

“ You have promised ? ”

“ I have.”

“ Keep my terrible secret.” She sank back, but Elfie gave her some mixture, which was ready, and the stimulating fluid revived her a little.

“ He is my brother—Harrold ! No one on earth knows that he lives but me. I have lost so much for him—all my peace, and have—my children. You, a woman, can do all for me, and what you can for my memory, and spare Harrold. I wish you—could know all——” A little sigh, and she died.

Elfie groaned, but she had not time to think of self. The settled features of Lady Bridlynton told the fatal truth. Dr. Hepworth only corroborated it.

Justine and the housekeeper proposed to undress the body.

“ It was Lady Bridlynton’s wish that she should not be disturbed,” said Elfie, firmly. “ Will you, sir,”—to the doctor—“ order that

a shell be brought here at the earliest possible moment?—I will remain with her till then.” It was as a command, and Dr. Hepworth found himself going out to give the order at once, without dispute or delay.

Mr. Somerton and Lady Alice drove away on that sad December morning, and Elfie, with another dying woman’s secret lying like lead upon her soul, moved about, weary as she was, to make the due preparations. Her hand shook so much, she could hardly write :—

“DEAR SIR THOMAS,

“Do come to me. Dear Lady Bridlynton was seized with sudden illness yesterday afternoon, and expired this morning. I am tired and desolate.

“Yours affectionately,

“SHERIDAN OAKBURY.”

Then she saw them wash the poor face, and put the hair, neatly braided, under a white cap which Justine arrayed with ribbons.

The shell was brought with wonderful despatch, and Lady Bridlynton placed within it,

the folds of her dark brown dress gathered about her form, and satin shoes placed carefully upon her feet, a white silken shawl, placed by Elfie herself, about the head and breast, leaving the face and the border of rich lace only visible. The whole did not wear the appearance of death in its usual ghastly form. Elfie, weighed down with the certainty that some terrible mystery was here, and that there was a reason why no hand was allowed to touch her friend, kept her promise. She would shield the mystery from all the world, and draw a veil, by her own constant attention, over that poor body and its sore sorrows.

She could not sleep till she had seen all this done, and had written to Lord Bridlynton, begging him, if health permitted, to come home at once. She felt till then as one in authority—that everything depended on her. She was so much exhausted, when her husband came, in the afternoon of Christmas Day, that he was alarmed at her altered looks and startled manner.

For, much absorbed in grief, no one at Bridlynton heard of Lady Alice Somerton's

illness till death was the sad fact which was borne to them, and Lord Bridlynton arrived, and was present at her funeral one day, and at her mother's the next, for the Bridlynton vault was in Widsdon church, some miles away ; that church was made as black as undertakers' cloth and fringe could make it, and the town of Widsdon showed respect by closing the shutters and taking down for the day of burial, all their holly, ivy, and mistletoe in the shop-windows.

The lady was little known, and her son less ; but yet they were the great people of the neighbourhood, and commanded respect. Some had acknowledged that there was a repellant influence about my lady, who did not court popularity or affection ; but now she was gone, everyone deeply regretted her.

From the time of the return of the carriages from the funeral, began a sad train of discoveries, and Lord Bridlynton found Elfie a ready confidante, and together they shrunk appalled at what he found. Some new extravagance at every turn, some reckless expenditure of monies which years ago he believed to have been placed safely, and that accumu-

lated wealth would have been his on taking up residence upon his property.

It was so terrible a blow, that he was glad to let Elfie advise him to return to Cannes, and not to examine further till a year had expired, as it would look better for the memory of his mother ; and she added,—

“She must have had some strong motive, and we will not condemn her, dear Lord Bridlynton ; it is a tangled, knotted web, but a year may do much towards unravelling it.”

But Lord Bridlynton did not go abroad again ; he yet lingered about home, and persuaded the Oakburys to remain his guests, and then went with them to the Chase for some weeks ; and in the meantime pretty Clara Somerton had taken such hold upon him, that he quite decided, as soon as the mourning in the two houses should be over, that he would ask Mr. Somerton for her hand.

Clara had looked upon him as a sick mind in a sick body, for he was very uncomfortable for a long time after his return ; but though he talked of going back to the south of France, to Malaga, or to Algiers, he never went.

Sometimes he appeared at Heatherside and visited the Skiptons, Miss Milner, and Constance, or the rectory, where the young people looked upon him as a man of fashion, and regarded his sayings and doings as something novel and interesting. There he learned better things than he could teach, and became so fond of Charlie, when he returned for the long vacation, that he never wished to leave England again. At least, he left off grumbling about the climate, and looked in perfect health.

CHAPTER VI.

BRIGHT DAYS.

It was March, and even April, which came in as it should, with sunshine and showers, and buds and every spring influence and beauty, before little Harrold made up his mind to live like another baby, and emerged from his flannels and caps, for he was a delicate, frail child, requiring warmth and great care.

His little face had a wise, *old-fashioned* look, as Mrs. Meriton explained it ; the features were marked and beautiful, and his eyes gleamed with sense—quite unlike the run of fat thriving babies in general, who vegetate with a vacant, uncertain look at anything and everything.

Harrold did not grow fat, but he lived and seemed contented, but as if he *thought* matters over deliberately ; seldom smiled, except when

his eyes met with some in whom he appeared to think he might confide.

Clara and Roderick were his favourites. He had a strange baby reserve with Edith, and did not cry when she took him, for he seemed proud of the indulgence, but resigned himself to it with a sigh, and looked relieved when he got away again.

It was reserved for Charlie to bring out anything like merriment, and the child crowed and grasped at him, and cried after him, with the fondest gestures, as if crying for his mother.

Mrs. Skipton's opinion that the crying after one was a source of maternal love, and that she would not care so much without this demonstration, Edith said, was verified in this case, and they all laughed at Charlie when the little one cried as he left the room.

Charlie let them laugh, and carried the little boy about the garden in the fine September and October days, and let him sleep in the study whilst he read.

"My son, I fear little Harrold is a trouble to you!"

"Oh no, father! there is something about him I cannot resist when I am at home."

"His eyes are like her's, Charles."

"Yes, and his way of moving his hands."

It was curious to see the Rector and his grown-up son talk together over the little cradle, and ease each other's sorrow, with the fragile boy between them.

"You will let me stay with you now, father?"

"I cannot, indeed, Charles; I cannot think it would be well for you to give up so good an appointment."

"I should like to do so, sir. I was very proud of the thing when I got it, but that time is over. I could be very useful here for a few years; and if you allow me to choose, I prefer my ordination to help here instead of the great appointment she was so proud about."

"It is too selfish for me to permit, Charles."

"Selfish? That is just what I feel with regard to the appointment; it would be all self—domestic chaplain to the Duke of Springvor! It would have done in the old time;

but I hope you will consent to my being your curate, sir, and I can do lots at home."

"It is too much, Charles."

"I do not want to be idle. There is Tom to be prepared. I undertake that; and, if you permit, Evelyn Hallowby and young Wallace will be glad to come, I know, for I must have some work for superabundant energy. Tom is so well trained, and Roddy wants very little help, and when Marcus Lyne goes the parish will occupy you, and I can help on Sundays and at your desire."

"I submit, my brave son; it is only too much comfort. Shall I write to the Duke to-day?"

"If you please, sir. Just tell him how things are; he will understand it."

"I understand it, at all events, for the sake of the girls, who will have you, and rejoice in the prospect."

"Well, I do not dispute that; but, father, I see plainly the two elders will not be here long."

"How?"

"Mr. Lyne will ask for Edith to go to his

living, or I am mistaken ; and,—mark my words,—Miss Clara will be very soon settled near us at Bridlynton.”

“Poor Edith ! I think it may be so ; she has been so good : I cannot spare her yet. I see, now you lay it before me, though, that it is probable that both your prophecies may come true. Dear me, Charles, even in such cases,—hopeful, pleasant as they are,—it seems to be a great relief to have you.”

“Thank you, father. Now I must take my small pupil to his nurse. I may tell the girls, then ?”

Mr. Somerton scarcely knew his joy, till his two elder daughters came to his study, and said,—

“Papa ! this is most delightful,—beyond anything we dared to hope !—a load of anxiety slips off about everything, now Charlie is not to go with Lord Springvor. How I dreaded it !”

Edith was spokeswoman.

“I trust I am not wrong in permitting this arrangement, Edith ; it is a great comfort.”

“It cannot be wrong, papa,” Clara urged.
“My mother would rather have us with Charlie

than with any lady companion in the world ; she always had such confidence in him. And, I suppose, but for this, we must have had some womankind about us, in the shape of a governess, for Mary and the little ones ; but now we shall not want her."

Edith said, looking so bright, that the perplexity which usually sat on her countenance was gone for ever,—

"I do not dread the future now, papa, either for ourselves or for you. We have as yet been in a sort of excitement of sorrow ; but that is past, and Charlie will cheer you. I feel so glad. I have never felt anything so like comfort all this year."

"My poor girls !"

"Do not say that, papa. We can bear mamma to be at rest,—better now I know how many things she had upon her mind. We two have never done half so much as she did, nor did we ever think of it."

"My good daughters !"

"Dear papa, we shall see you look comforted now, and enjoy the company of Charlie," said Clara.

“And you will be able to rest sometimes on Sundays, and let him preach.”

“God bless my good children !” said Mr. Somerton.

The look of an old man had come upon him since his wife’s death ; but his good son did comfort him, and a weight of responsibility was lifted from his shoulders by anticipation of Charles’s help and society.

The pleasure grounds of Gervase Skipton blossomed and faded ; a fresh coat of green paint had been given to the railings ; and the terra cotta vases had produced marvels in the way of stone crop and creeping plants. The lawn was as smooth as Turner could make it, —emulating velvet ; and the back garden had yielded abundant summer crops : and Virginia, up to the waist in mould, was seeing to autumn work ; whilst Jenny counted apples, and Mr. Skipton read his papers.

It was late, therefore, in autumn, when a visitor arrived. It was Lord Bridlynton, who had laid his case before the father of Clara at the rectory, and been accepted.

Everybody talked things over with Mr. Skip-

ton ; so his lordship, of course, followed suit, and was admitted into the little parlour, where stood the quaintly-formed table invented by himself, where Gervase wrote his letters,—everything, in short, was peculiar in form ; but the kind heart of the owner and his good common sense made him adviser in general, or recipient of plans to the whole neighbourhood, from Lord Bridlynton and his love for Clara, to Charles Somerton on the score of taking youngsters to teach, and even as to the merits of Nurse Meriton as matron.

On the same autumn day Clara, happy and hopeful, went to drive, with Mary ; for it was needful for her to take some one, in her state of intense pleasure. They visited some poor invalid, and then met Mr. Lyne.

Bessie and Bertie were with him.

“ Miss Mary,” said he, “ will you consent to drive two friends of mine ? ”

“ Certainly, Mr. Lyne ; but where am I to put them ? ”

“ Your sister will consent,” he said to Clara, “ to walk back with me ; that is, I hope she will give me that pleasure.”

Clara looked. The eager little girls took her place.

"Take care, Mary, how you drive; do not attempt to go on to the yard, but stop at the hall-door."

"Very well; I will."

"May we go and visit Mrs. Skipton afterwards, sister?"

"Yes, if you like; and give her my love."

Mary was proud to be trusted with her little sisters; she put the shawl neatly over their knees, gathered up the reins, and drove off.

"Mr. Lyne, you will spoil Bessie and Berta."

"No, Miss Clara; but I am very selfish."

"They are dear little girls," said Clara.

"They are, Miss Clara. I said I am selfish, but yet I wish to give my mother a great pleasure too."

"As well as yourself?"

"Exactly. Now, Mr. Charles Somerton has given me leave to congratulate you, and I do so from my heart; but my own selfishness troubles me terribly."

"How so?" He stood irresolute.

"I hoped soon to ask my rector if he could

venture to entertain a thought that I might aspire to the hand of your sister ; I did not wish to be precipitate."

Clara looked at her black dress, and tears came.

"I fear you think that in accepting happiness we could forget my mother. It is not so, Mr. Lyne ; we are as fond of her, and feel that in all we undertake it will be our first consideration, would she like it, or have liked it."

"Miss Clara, my mother is my friend too, and I did hope to ask your sister to be a daughter to her ; but the great disparity between Lord Bridlynton and my position in life renders me uncertain whether I ought to venture, so I come to you for advice, and I beg you to tell me what your father's sentiments would be."

"I think you had better go to papa," she said.

"And ask him to give me his right hand to take away with me ! It will be like losing both his daughters."

"Perhaps you would like me to resign Lord Bridlynton ?" said Clara, laughing.

"I see my fears are groundless; I will venture, for I cannot bear suspense longer."

"Papa will——" Clara faltered.

"Think I might have waited, perhaps? But the example which might have emboldened anyone else has quite damped me. I fear Mr. Somerton will refuse."

"Papa will——" she began again. Mr. Lyne could see that tears were glistening through her crape veil.

"Do go on, Miss Clara, if you can."

"Papa will miss us much less, as Charles is to be at Heatherside; and, I was going to say, as he knows so well, with whom Edith is going."

"Then I have your consent?"

"I fear mine is of little use; but Mary has a steady head, and papa will be able to get Aunt Constance if they want anyone."

"Thank you; you are very kind to me," said Mr. Lyne.

Marcus Lyne applied to Charlie, and then to Mr. Somerton, who said he saw light breaking through the thick clouds. Compensation, and even consolation, were coming; it was well to have his girls chosen by men he

liked, and the Rector promised Edith to Mr. Lyne without fear.

Mrs. Skipton gave a quiet tea-party on the strength of the two engagements. The young people from the rectory, Constance and Margaret Milner, attended ; also Mr. Lyne. Gervase was most agreeable ; he could talk on any subject ; and Lord Bridlynton appeared just as tea was over.

“I drove over to spend the evening with Charles Somerton,” he said ; “so I hope Mrs. Skipton allows me to join him here.”

His excuse provoked a smile, and Virginia was as happy as mortal could be.

After tea, Gervase brought out portfolios of worth and beauty in original drawings, illustrations, and illuminations. He had collected rare engravings at different times and places when travelling years before, and Virginia had made cases which defied smoke and dust.

Some costly cameos were taken from a cedar box, which itself possessed a story ; then Lord Bridlynton had a ring with a cameo, which he bought in Florence, and Constance told the tale concerning it, which she had learned from Lady

Bridlynton. Mr. Skipton and the Rector got off amongst the Etruscans and their works of some thousand years ago, and Marcus Lyne looked at engravings from Milton, and then some architectural pictures caught his eye, and he spoke of windows, arches, corbeilles, and mullions, with Margaret Milner.

Mrs. Skipton gathered up the engravings of scenes from "Paradise Lost," saying,—

"I never can forgive Milton for having left our first parents in such abject condition, nor for having chosen the devil for his hero!"

"My dear Virginia!" said her husband.

"It is true, Gervase; the poem would be nothing but for Satan! We all read about the Messiah being triumphant over the spleen and machination of Satan, and Milton makes his grandest description that of the descent into the regions of death. Christ, on the wings of angels, is conveyed again—that I admit, but the devil, discovered by the Messiah, and hurled into the depths of the bottomless pit, with its horrors all portrayed, is the piece which seizes on our senses; and Death, conscious that his power is overthrown, tenders

his crown and key at the Redeemer's feet, comes only second."

"You forget, Virginia, the resuscitation of the saints; the first resurrection begins immediately."

"No, I do not forget."

"Then these received by Christ, enveloped in glory, appear. Abraham conferring is shown, and that vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. The saints are assured of the reward of immortality; Gabriel returns to earth; Moses has explained the purport of resurrection, and Paradise springs from the regions of death."

"Yes," said Virginia, "but Satan is the hero."

"Inasmuch as this, certainly. Milton has given, in a style of elevated grandeur, a being of terrible sublimity, the author of all gigantic evils, and made him contend for the supremacy of Heaven; hatred, revenge, and despair, are his attributes, and he is clothed with arch-angelic strength and power."

"A hero, therefore," said Virginia.

"With these tremendous and dreadful qualities he has mixed so much courage, beauty, and grace——"

"As to make him a hero," said Mrs. Skipton.

"——That I cannot help a thrill of pleasure when I read the beautiful description."

"And what do you say to the Seventh Book, where by far the greater portion of the human race are liquefying for ages in everlasting fire?"

"The description is horrible," said Mr. Somerton. "Let us trust there is much misapprehension on Milton's part. Remember our Saviour, at sight of so much agony, is made to give 'A sigh of natural pity as from man to man, although in merited distress.'"

"Father, suppose we leave Milton and those pages of torment," said Charles. "I used to dream of them when a boy."

"So did I," observed Mr. Skipton; "my poor mother used to read those scenes to me of burnings and never-ending misery whilst I was yet too young, and the misery endured for years haunted me every night when I went to lie down."

"And yet you want to deny my hero. Come, Gervase, now help the hot elder wine

and biscuits, for Mr. Somerton always likes our wine."

Spiced hot elder wine appeared, as hot as fire could make it, which being finished, the girls went to find cloaks and bonnets, and returned to say Good-night. Mrs. Gervase Skipton put a packet into Edith's hand, and another into Clara's, saying, "Not till you get home," and they proceeded to the rectory.

Before them all Clara impatiently opened her paper; a purple case appeared, and a beautiful set of pearls.

"My daughter, what is that?"

"From Mrs. Skipton, papa."

Roderick picked up a paper, and read, "For Lady Bridlynton, with Virginia's love."

How Clara blushed, and ran away, and how Lord Bridlynton seemed to enjoy it!

Edith opened hers deliberately; the case and set of pearls were exactly similar, only the paper said, "For Mrs. Marcus Lyne."

"How kind of Mrs. Skipton!" "How well chosen!" "How good she is!" were some of the ejaculations. Edith hardly knew whether to look happy or not, till Charlie said,—

“How my mother would have thanked Mrs. Skipton.”

Then she gave way to happiness, and felt how very thankful they ought to be, that, motherless, they were not deserted; but that God had given to the family so many blessings—even if Lady Alice were not permitted to witness them.

CHAPTER VII.

“THE GOLDEN EMPIRE.”

ELFIE was so broken down in health after the death of her friend, that some months passed with anxiety. Sir Thomas could not make out her case, neither the doctor, who talked of nerves and a shock to the system ; but Mr. Meadows recommended a complete change of air and scene, and she accompanied her husband to Scotland, where he had some grouse shooting, and she plenty of mountain air ; but it failed to brace her, and they came back to Oakbury Chase, where Lord Bridlynton joined them in time for the hunting season, and saw, with much sorrow, how thin his hostess had become.

“You are not well, Lady Oakbury, I fear.”

“No; I cannot recover my strength properly,” she said.

But she rallied during his visit, and listened to his story, and congratulated him on his choice of Clara Somerton, and failed not to greet his pretty bride, when, in the early days of February, he married her very quietly; for it was only fourteen months after his mother's death, and also of Lady Alice Somerton.

He had made moderate settlements, and postponed the regular investigation of his affairs on finding Mr. Somerton was very easily satisfied; but he promised to make further arrangements when they should return from Rome, whither he carried off his Clara, to revel in ruins, churches, and the other allurements of the poor Eternal City.

Sir Thomas strove hard with his anxiety, but he came off victoriously in the struggle, and never once doubted Elfie, who felt deeply grateful for his abundant love. She knew he had been sorely tried, for serious illness set in after her grief at Bridlynton; and in the night wanderings, he learnt that some one called

"Harrold" had something to do with her pain of mind; but he determined to hope on, and cheer up, and after long waiting his reward came.

The one Lady Bridlynton called "Harrold," driven almost to madness, after the robbery of Messrs. Cornish and Co.'s bank, sailed from the shores of England, intending to remain a year or two in absence, and then take a vessel homeward bound.

Fits of abstraction came over Zadoiski, or Thomas Bradden—the name on the ship's books—and his fellow-sailors sought to cheer him, thinking he was leaving his wife and family; but he would turn upon them with a fierce anger and resent their interference, till one and all kept aloof.

The captain and those in authority found him prompt and obedient; he did his share of duty well. The passengers found him civil; and the better class of emigrants looked out for "Tall Tom" in any emergency case. It became a season of comparative comfort to the hunted fugitive, whose only grief would be when the voyage was over—he had none for

the woman whose life he rendered sad, none that he had wasted her children's patrimony,—no contrition for his lost and worthless life.

In one month they hoped to land, and he knew he should be adrift again. His gains never bettered him; the sums he extracted from Lady Bridlynton always went for some pressing, terrible debt; he was never the better individually.

Every circumstance tended to increase his innate love of evil; the ascendancy had been long and strong; the result, that, obscure, unknown—because he had cunning to remain unrecognised—he was hunted down by private malice; such was his own estimation of affairs.

The principles of evil, then, aggravated by circumstances, caused his emigration scheme; but he would yet return: he was nervously impatient as the days grew nearer. The affair of the Bridlynton diamonds haunted him, and he accused Harriet of not having done her best for him—so utterly base and selfish had he become.

At midnight came a wail—there was a great cry of agony on board the “Golden Empire,”

wrung from souls on the brink of transition to another state. A terrible abyss yawned—a noise of timbers grating on a rock—and men, women, and children were hurled into the waves together.

Some encountered death calmly, with a prayer upon their lips; some with the calm which attended the earnest life with a better life in view. One man had a dear child, and lashed it to his body, hoping Providence would find a way for safety. Husbands and wives sought each other in the roaring waters—happy those who could die together.

Weeping, wailing, screaming, crying, or groaning, assailed all ears, as young and old were pitching in the seething billows.

An actress who was a passenger, had hoped to make a fortune and enchant the multitude in the far-off southern ports, clung now, a friendless woman, to a spar, and dashed boldly from the sinking ship. No paint on those cheeks now, no false hair in flowing ringlets or elaborate plaits; her own thin locks were scattered over her poor neck to the winds of heaven. Her great eyes expressive of terror, not despair; no

cap—no comb—nothing but a white night-dress covered her.

She floated—and a man, seeing her at a safe distance, followed her example, and was saved ; he held a piece of timber, and struck out.

The captain shouted for the boats ; the crew tried to unloose the fastenings—they were level with the water—they might have lived. But down she went—the “Golden Empire”—suddenly ; all chance gone—the captain at his post. The boats filled, went down, and one—recovered—floated bottom up.

Harrold saw the captain die—saw his companions struggle, and give in—passengers, emigrants, and crew ; food, poultry, stores, floated and disappeared.

He took no trouble to account for anything ; self-preservation, which sticks to man as his last attribute, did not desert him—the instinct was strong.

He swam boldly to a distant coral reef ; there seated himself, and let the play go on.

Presently a white mass neared him, and he seized the poor actress,—next a strong man in his agony, more exhausted than herself.

They could scarcely congratulate each other. The man shed bitter tears ; his wife and five young children were gone down.

The woman shivered in her wet, white gown, but was denied the relief of weeping.

Harrold began to swear. The man said, “Rather, let us pray;” and, on his bended knees, on the sharp, hard coral, he who had lost all poured forth fervent words for help, for mercy, and forgiveness.

The woman rose and knelt, too, the reef making little wounds with its rough edges, which bled as she did so ; but life regained its sway.

No food, no water, and no clothes.

Harrold took off his sailor’s shirt, and the man contributed his jacket ; but she had to place them to lie down upon, and tried to rest, —the man sitting so as to shade her poor head from the sun.

Harrold sought all round the little island for some kind of herb,—a bunch of weeds,—a nucleus, to form in time the mass of foliage and beautiful green things that do expand in southern air and southern ocean.

But he tried in vain. There was so little as yet, and his feet were cut and bleeding ; so he tried to catch the birds which,—tame, or rather without fear, for they knew nothing of mankind, came near ; but the feathered creatures had all the advantages, the footing being sharp and insecure.

Nothing to eat floated from the wreck. Now and then a mass, which they knew to be a human form, went by ; and on the third day two great sharks appeared. The woman saw them, and was too weak to scream, and they all knew their errand.

Sores were breaking out on their bodies ; and their tongues ceased to articulate.

Once more a night of agony ; and in the morning, when the sun illumined the bright sea once more,—for it was the last time for her,—the glory broke over ; and the stars, which had seemed so close, and the Southern Cross so vivid, began to fade.

The woman turned her eyes with gratitude to one man and the other, and died.

They each heaved a heavy sigh, almost of relief, that one had ceased to suffer.

The emigrant,—a decent man, of some good education,—kneeled, and said all he could muster with his weakened brain, and all he could get his poor parched lips and swollen tongue to utter, of the Service for the Dead, adding,—

“We might not be able when it gets hotter.”

They could not bear to touch her ; but the coat and shirt were taken from under, and laid carefully over her. The man prayed silently again, and then they waited.

The sun grew very hot : they dared not bathe by reason of the sharks ; they felt the gigantic creatures were ready to take them.

Agony became almost unendurable, when Harrold touched his mate upon the shoulder, and pointed out far into the ocean.

A little sail ! and, after hours of expectation, the signal was seen. The emigrant held up his shirt and stockings.

The two poor men were rescued ; and the body of the woman, sewed in a sail, was committed to the deep, with heavy shot, in the South Pacific Ocean.

The last scene of the poor actress was played

without a name. The men were unable to speak, and lay in hammocks at the point of death.

The emigrant recovered first, though Harrold had borne up more bravely on the reef. The former returned to his deserted home and aged father, fondly welcomed. Harrold went to London. Two others, likewise rescued from the "Golden Empire," landed at Cardiff; but Harrold borrowed a five-pound note from the emigrant, and then discarded all acquaintance with the vessel.

Blackened like a sweep, he passed through London. In such disguise he could find out what he wanted to know from servants; and as he carried a second-hand machine, and had watched how it was used, he tried his prentice hand in the house Lady Bridlynton had hired in town; but the old care-taker, though she gave him his breakfast, could tell nothing of that lady's doings.

It was early one morning that he bought a suit of clothes of one of those vendors who are satisfied to give little information as to whence they came, and, in the sweep's garb, proceeded

by rail to the nearest station towards Bridlynton ; and then, having ascertained that the lady was at home, he retired, and dressed himself as a messenger, and appeared, as described.

A few words told of his shipwreck on the coral reef, and again he left the house.

Elfie saw him, and he passed to the place where he meant to meet Lady Bridlynton.

The adequate excuse to his own mind for the murder committed, for it was as the sweep, unseen, that he fired on his old enemy, the care-taker, who had been the means of his leaving when called Henry Thorpe, was, that it was justifiable homicide ; in fact, Harrold was fit rather for a lunatic asylum than to go at large. His reckless and cruel courage urged him on, his concentrated cunning failed nevertheless, in his desire to obtain the diamonds. Nothing can be urged in extenuation in all concerning him, except the blind fear on the part of woman to avoid a criminal prosecution ; the terrible mistake of one secret became an incubus not to be diminished—but to return.

Harrold devoured the food brought to him ; he looked wild and haggard, older now than his

age, though he had battled off time till the last few months.

“ Harriet, I must have the diamonds.”

“ It is impossible. They are gone.”

“ It is untrue, give me proof.”

She put into his hand some papers ; his eyes glared with anger ; maddened, he took her wrist.

“ I do not believe it yet.”

“ You may believe it ; they are gone ; sold, Harrold, and for you. I have lost all my peace in life for you, Harrold, and should my son marry, his wife will wear only false, imitation diamonds.”

“ You deceive me.”

“ No ; I have done all, given all, but life for you, Harrold.”

“ Your life ? You tell me a lie.”

“ Harrold ! ”

“ Yes, Harriet.”

“ You try me too much ; this interview is more than I can bear ; my very life, I think, will go for you. I have kept your secret all these years, and you have imposed upon me too much—pray save yourself ! Here is all the

money I have in the house, but I will keep your secret for ever—only go.”

She turned to leave him, he raised a small revolver, and fired ; she then turned, and said,—

“ Farewell, you are yet safe.”

All were too busy within to notice the distant report ; the papers concerning which they spoke were in the pocket of her dress ; the basket she carried to the window, where Elfie let her in.

He was so daring (engineers talk much of professional daring), he had become so prudent, so subtle, it had become a habit with him, a means of escaping detection, that he waited, where he could watch without being suspected.

One carriage after another rolled up the wide approach ; from his station he could not hear the words, so, incapable at last of bearing further torture of suspense, he drew near the stables, saying, in a civil tone, and collected voice,—

“ I am sent to ask about her ladyship, sir ? ”

“ All but gone, I believe.”

Murder, murder, rang in his ears ; double

murder, but he dared not leave the stable yard ; it was too much—could Harriet be dying ?

“ How is her ladyship, sir ? ” to a person at the hall door, whither he wandered ; he addressed the words,—

“ Just gone.”

“ It was sudden ? ”

“ Very—complaint of the heart, they say,”—the servant hastened on in search of somebody.

Then his first thought, horrible as it appears, was shaped into the words,—

“ Perhaps she died game, after all ? ”

And he tried to review the whole affair, the whole long-life worry he had been to her and the fatal end. But so many persons were about her—the doctor, the servants, and Mr. Somerton ; he would know the actual cause, and seek for the perpetrator to-morrow.

Insane now with terror, he made over ditch and hedge, and field, towards Heatherside Rectory, and looked to find if the Rector were expected.

Ben took down the shutters to show Martha the falling snow, and he discharged the other bullet as described.

He could not doubt that Mr. Somerton having been called to administer the last rites of the church to the dying woman, would promise to set a watch for the miscreant. Full of enmity against the man whom he considered as Harriet's confessor, he stalked over the snow to meet him.

Lady Alice averted the catastrophe; raising the arm with the handle of the whip, he was spared the crime of firing another barrel, by dropping the revolver, and seeking to regain it, his footing gave way, and it was rolled into a deep ditch as he recovered himself.

He walked back to Bridlynton, and peeped in with a smiling face to the long room at the inn, where so many forms lay sleeping, and he too fell down amongst them and slept.

His blunted conscience had no thorns, or they were too much worn down to prick.

The abortive investigation disclosed nothing. The care-taker was buried. The gamekeeper recovered, and kept a sharp look-out as to poachers; and the murder was never brought to light.

English justice is bold, and can bring the

highest criminal to judgment. But the criminal must be caught, be he high, ignoble, or obscure ; and Harrold was caught when he returned to London, but not in the dress of the messenger, or of the sweep ; but with the money in his pocket he grew lavish, and an official found him eating his dinner in the city, dressed as a railway clerk, or something in that style ; and he was shortly afterwards convicted on the old charge—the robbery at the bank.

CHAPTER VIII.

EDITH.

LITTLE Harrold asserted his claim to brotherhood by living to be petted and loved by all.

At the next ordination by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese, Charles Somerton became curate of Heatherside, and warmed and comforted many hearts by his choice.

Mrs. Meriton, with much delight, made preparations for his pupils, Charles having wisely determined that he need not be idle though at home, nor need he take from his father the interest of his parish work. Evelyn Hallowby, a young Judgworth, and a Leighton Lee, with a pair of youths, nephews of Dr. Hepworth, arrived; and the young Wallace expected, did not fail. He brought two terriers, which were more than Charlie bargained for; but "Bruce"

and "Dandie" were consigned to the care of Ben, and became part of the family, joining in all the ways of the boys, seeking the ball at cricket, running beside the ponies, and behaving altogether in a most irregular manner for dogs, till Bessie said they were "real schoolboys."

Evelyn Hallowby was a fine fellow, brought up in the open air, strong and manly. Charles found him all unlearned in Latin and Greek, but with a good French accent imparted by his sister's governess; and the boy set to his lessons with the same zeal he would have "gone in" for a rabbit hunt. He did everything in real earnest; and so, by mere plodding, attained the first half what other boys took at least a year to cram down.

Charlie kept two ponies for his pupils. Mr. Skipton said, "You will not make money by your school;" but he was not grasping, and he knew the nature of boys, so he trusted them implicitly, and Evelyn Hallowby got more of the riding than any one, since it was made a reward; and that boy rode like a young Centaur, as if a part of the animal he bestrode; and, moreover, was so pleasant and good tem-

pered, that the elder fellows frequently gave him their turn.

Mr. Somerton felt less lonely with his son and the pupils about the place. Charles got the boys on; and his sisters were contented, and little Harrold looked for his coming in as his greatest joy in life.

Charles Somerton read the beautiful Liturgy well, so pleasingly, and distinctly, and preached good sermons, too, preferring practical to doctrinal, which he left, with becoming modesty, to older men.

Edith as yet remained head of the household; and letters from Clara came often to cheer her sister with happy hopes and agreeable daily details. So life at Somerton rectory went on: they had suffered, but were not paralysed; and the direct influence of Lady Alice on each character of her children was not even weakened as months went by, so perfect had been the confidence, so pure her motives, that such a mother's care could not be lost.

Peace and love were the ruling, guarding "life lines" in that household.

It was yet early in the new year, when

Edith had a letter from Mrs. Judgworth, which may speak for itself:—

“MY DEAR MISS SOMERTON,

“For I feel you, as head of the family, and so soon to become a wife, require respect! Dear Edith is better; more like old times. I want you, dear child, to come to the Grange once more: try if you can arrange it. I am unwilling to ask Mr. Somerton, or I think your aunt Constance could be trusted to supply your place, for we shall have three years’ probation, Captain Judgworth having been appointed “Captain Commissioner of the Dockyard at Portness.” We are to go thither in May, and must shut up all here till our return. As it will give him a thousand a year, besides the great pleasure of active employment, I cannot but rejoice.

“Isabella wants to see you so much; she has anticipations of great delight in the yacht or the captain’s boat; for she is, as you know, an amphibious girl—fonder, indeed, of water than land. The winter having been without extreme cold, we have had many expeditions to see

Mrs. Lyne, who is as busy getting her son's house ready, as if it were her first object in life, which I do think, dear Edith, it is.

"I also have great interest in this parsonage ; and the fine garden is already laid out with much taste. But I ought not to trench upon this ground ; it is probably Mrs. Lyne's intention to surprise you. Isabella and Georgy send love, and hoping you will fix an early time for your visit,

"Ever affectionately yours,

"G. JUDGORTH."

"Oh, I cannot go ; do not ask it," Edith said, in reply to her aunt, when Constance thought the change would be good, and offered to take all the duties off her hands.

"I should not like to go to the dear Grange now, where I used to be so happy with mamma—but everything is changed. I sometimes think it is selfish for me to go away at all. Only for Charlie, I would never have left papa ; and then, Constance, mother liked the Lynes, and would have chosen Marcus, I know, could such an event have been possible.

It is such a comfort that he was with her so much."

"And at the Grange, too!"

"Yes; they know him there; so I am not running away with a stranger," said Edith. "And it will be very nice, our beginning at his new living together."

"Very nice, Edith; and, as your lives may probably be spent there, it is nice also that it is in such a charming country and near the Grange."

"But the Grange will be deserted?"

"For a time, just long enough to throw you on your own resources, and not teach you to depend on Mrs. Judgworth."

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Somerton, to whom Edith read the letter, and said, "If you please, papa, I prefer not to go."

"I am glad of that, my child. As we are to have you so short a time, I am pleased that you prefer to remain here."

So a reply was despatched to the Grange, where the daughters of Lady Alice had often spent happy weeks, to the effect that Edith

thought it her duty to remain with her father.

In April, Clara returned, and was to spend a day or two at Heatherside, and then begin life at the Park.

With better health came back all Lord Bridlynton's energy. Mr. and Mrs. Skipton were at Versailles, and, on the way home, he took his wife there for a fortnight, and quietly talked over his affairs with Gervase.

Lawyers' letters had made him *au fait* of many circumstances, which pained and grieved him. But he was contented to live quietly with Clara, and let time redeem matters, as time can, with respect to income.

He told Clara that he was less wealthy than he fancied, even when he made such moderate settlements; and finally, of the substitution of paste for the fine family diamonds.

"But that could never matter to me," said his wife; "I should never have worn them—no, not even at a drawing-room. I mean it, Arthur. I never should. My mother would not have approved of one of her girls adorning herself with a parure of diamonds. As to the

intrinsic value, if you are sorry for the loss, I am ; but, for ornament, the set of pearls which Mrs. Skipton gave, and the pretty things you have bought for me expressly, are dear to me, and therefore I may use them for the givers' sake."

"I shall be very glad if my wife can bravely go through her duties without injury," said Arthur.

"Mamma used to pray that we might be kept unspotted from the world, and I never feel afraid. Duties and pleasures are so easily driven together."

"Then we will both try to find it so, Clara."

Strenuous efforts seldom fail, nor virtuous determination.

Lord Bridlynton, on his return home, made himself fully acquainted with the state of his money matters, and, though the hidden motive of such lavished sums had been kept from him, he knew some secret had been maintained, and it was not unravelled, even with Mr. Skipton ; who, therefore, kept his surmises to himself, as he had no proofs to adduce, and suspicions died out.

Timber was marked to be felled at the earliest; and the fortunes of Adelaide and Charlotte so assured to them that their husbands never knew the difficulties which had been surmounted.

Clara was glad to see her husband employed, and he came to think more and more how fortunate his choice in a wife had been; so the highest point of human felicity was gained by Clara. She was the pride and helpmeet of Lord Bridlynton.

CHAPTER IX.

CLARA.

THERE was no reason why Clara should not accept the invitation of her old friend, Mrs. Judgworth, and so she and Lord Bridlynton accepted it, for he was fond of yachting, and sea air always did him good, and the visit to his wife's friends had even greater charms, since it would give him the benefit of seeing a naval station and dock works ; and they were soon installed in the Captain Commissioner's house at Portness, where every article was marked with the Queen's broad arrow.

He spent the morning in the dock-yard, and watched the work gangs counted and examined at the gate, and sometimes with a little speculation upon the forms before him, and wondering questions to his own

mind, what species of crime brought them there.

A few known characters were spotted out to him by one of the officers, but the multitude were only nameless convicts and felons.

The society at the captain's house amused him too—the novelty consisting in the entire number he met at dinner being sea-going captains, or officials about the dockyard. The ladies were all captains' wives, who had come to see the ships fitting out, and to say farewell. Clara was very happy with Mrs Judgworth and her daughters, and walked with them in the inclosure, or sometimes beyond the walls.

The yacht was placed at Lord Bridlynton's disposal, with complete crew, and Miss Judgworth was at all times ready for a cruise. Clara and Georgy sometimes went, and sometimes staid at home with Mrs. Judgworth.

They were all preparing for a sail one day, when Clara alarmed her husband by walking towards him as he sat writing, and fainting at his feet.

It was some time before he could be brought

to understand the cause of her emotion : it was this :—

Six men were daily told off and sent into the house of the Captain Commissioner to clean the hall and passages, polish the stoves, wash the stone stairs, and dust the balustrades. It was seldom that the ladies encountered them, it being a tacit arrangement to avoid the convicts' hour for passing up and down stairs. Clara ran for something from the drawing-room which she wanted whilst getting ready. The men were in the hall. She passed them, got her errand to the drawing-room executed, and was returning. A man stood by to let her pass, having a brass rod in his hand, which he was polishing. His tall figure, grey head, and something in his gesture, which was that of a gentleman, caused her to look up.

There was something in his eyes which set her brain whirling—something in his form which sent a thrill through her whole frame. She trembled, hesitated, passed on—not to her own room, but to Lord Bridlynton's dressing-room.

With difficulty he restored her, and laid her on a sofa.

“What frightened you, my darling?”

“That man,” she said; “I cannot be mistaken.”

“What man, Clara?”

“I suppose,” she said, recovering and sitting up, “Captain Judgworth would say I had no business to see who cleaned the stairs. But he looked so like a gentleman; yet I should have thought nothing only for his eyes; they are very peculiar, and I saw them so plainly that night when he struck the match.”

“I do not yet understand,” said Lord Bridlynton.

“I mean,” said Clara, “that I am very sure this is the man who fired into our kitchen-window, and who fired that night which caused our mother’s death.”

“Well, it is strange, but possible; now try to look better, or the yacht will not see me to-day. The tide will serve in an hour later, by which time I suppose the Oakburys may be here.”

“To-day?”

“Yes; I heard at breakfast they are coming

down for some days. It will do Lady Oakbury good."

"You are very fond of her?"

"Yes, Clara, very. I like Lady Oakbury better than any woman I know—next to my own little wife."

"I hope she will like me," said Clara. "I have only seen her two or three times, and she seemed very silent."

"She has had things, I fancy, little woman, to make her silent; but she has a quiet kind of happiness which is very endearing, and her husband is such a good fellow."

"His heart doth surely trust in her?" said Clara.

"Very surely. Come, let me finish my letter, we shall keep the crew waiting otherwise."

The day was beautiful—just right for their yachting—and the way they preferred to go; breeze sufficient, and sunshine, without too much heat. Clara said the day was made for them. The Miss Judgworths enjoyed the luncheon, and told them the different points, as they passed fine seats with noble trees, or rich pasture down to the water's edge.

Sir Thomas Oakbury and "Elfie" were at dinner, and Mrs. Judgworth seemed very glad at her successful arrangement of guests, for Lord Bridlynton looked so well contented.

In the morning Georgy had found Teresa, and made great progress in her friendship. She spoke of it at breakfast.

"You are a perfect Italian scholar, Lady Oakbury, I hear, and I do so envy you."

"Some day, Miss Judgworth, you may be more perfect than I am. You will have to go to Florence, where good accent is better acquired."

"No," said Clara, blushing, "is it not '*lingua Toscana ma bocca Romana*?'"

"I believe you are right."

"Clara, I forgot you! and I know you have just come from Rome, and Lady Alice said so much about Italian. Oh! who will come and hear me read?"

"Nobody," said her father, gruffly.

But when everyone had settled for the day to some amusement or other, Lord Bridlynton called Georgy, saying, "Let us have a quiet bit of Dante, Miss Georgy, and I dare say

you will astonish Teresa with your 'lingua Toscana.'"

"And 'bocca Romana' from you. Oh! oh! I will run and fetch my book."

She chose the sorrowful story of "Ugolino," reading well and translating fluently:—

"The hour approached when we expected to have something brought us to eat, but instead of that I heard the doors of our dungeon more closely barred.

"In silence I beheld my little children; I could not weep. My heart was turned to stone. The little creatures wept, and dear Anselmo said, 'Father, look on us, what ails you?' I could neither cry nor speak, but continued swallowed up in agony all that day, and the following night, till the dawn of another.

"As soon as a glimmering ray appeared in the doleful prison, and I could view those four faces, in which my own image was impressed, I gnawed my two hands with grief and rage. My children, thinking I did this through eagerness to appease my hunger, cried, 'Oh, father, our torture would be less if you would allay your hunger upon us.'

“ I then restrained myself to save them increase of misery. We were mute that day and the following. The fourth day Gaddo extended himself at my feet, where he fell, exclaiming, ‘ Oh, my father, why do you not help me ? ’ and so died.

“ The other three, one after the other, expired between the fifth and sixth day—famished—as you see me now ! And I, being seized with blindness, began to grope for them with my hands and feet, and continued calling on them by their several names three days after they were dead ; then hunger vanquished all my grief.”

“ You have translated that so well it sounded as if written in English.”

“ Do you believe such misery can be endured ? ”

“ I suppose it is, but do not harrow your feelings with woes that may never happen.”

“ No, I will go out ; I feel depressed after that story,” and Georgy fled to seek Teresa for a walk.

Teresa was timid amongst the people whom she classed with galley slaves, whom she had

seen in Italy doing convict work—at draw-bridges or on the road.

“ Lady Oakbury, you come too,” said Georgy.

“ Where, Miss Georgy ? ”

“ Oh, round the yards and dockworks.”

“ Can we go ? ”

“ We will tell papa you want to see them ; he will be quite flattered and glad enough to get out of his stuffy little office with a respectable excuse.”

It was all so new, so curious and interesting, that Elfie was glad to comply with Georgina’s wish, and Teresa was full of curiosity, and some terrors only served to give a spice and zest to it.

Captain Judgworth put on his cap to accompany the ladies, and took them to the sheds and ship-building in progress, from laying down the keel to varnishing the cabins.

Then they proceeded towards the water, and saw men at work driving piles, to enlarge that portion.

Lady Oakbury watched and listened with interest to Captain Judgworth’s remarks and information.

A set of men were busy in the mud and ooze at low water, not overworking themselves, it is true, but under such humiliating circumstances and espionage, none could watch them without considering that whatsoever their offence might have been against God or the laws of England, the expiation was miserable enough.

Captain Judgworth was called aside to speak to some one ; a naval officer, whom Georgina knew, lifted his cap, and stood beside Lady Oakbury.

“ It is sad to watch those men,” she said.

“ Yes, poor fellows, hard lines enough in the slime and mud from the river ; ”—turning round he pointed,—

“ That gang is told off for Bermuda, they will pass here in an instant. I am told some were recommended for mercy, but did not obtain it.”

They passed, stalwart forms in degradation and disgrace, with a stolid, stupified expression, most of them. One taller than the rest held himself erect, and moved with even grace, fallen as he was.

One glance was enough ; Elfie recognised "Harrold." He cast upon her one beam of those wondrous eyes ; it showed the recognition was reciprocal.

Who can describe the effect upon Lady Oak-bury ? She was inured to mystery—her mind suspended—she could not even think ; it was unutterable surprise, quenching the very desire to ask how he came there.

It was heroism on her part to have borne so long the secret that this man lived—it was her secret alone now, and more than ever she knew the importance of keeping it inviolate.

The glare of those eyes agonised her, but she stood her ground firmly, and watched the double row of men walk out of sight.

"Told off for Bermuda," she echoed, repeating her words, till Georgy said,—

"I dare say they will like the change. I suppose they will spend the winter in the West Indies ?"

The naval officer replied—

"Probably the rest of their lives—some bear it out wonderfully. You see, our convict sys-

tem prevents any great waste of energy, the poor fellows do very little."

"So I have been told," said Elfie, "that regular labourers work much harder."

"It is so, indeed; but hard work and liberty—" Captain Judgworth returned to claim his two ladies, and the walk continued till he was sent for again; then Lady Oakbury sought her own room, repeating—

"Told off for Bermuda."

She felt so ill that evening it was an effort to dress, and an effort to dine; her husband saw with distress that everything became an effort, and she could not shake off even the appearance.

"You will play for us, Lady Oakbury?" asked Mrs. Judgworth.

"Certainly." And she played. "Faust" had given way to "L'Africaine," and that opera she practised as it pleased others, keeping to her "barrel organ time," and part of an air would repeat—"Told off for Bermuda."

But in spite of her languor, the evening passed off pleasantly to every one else, and she had grown too strong in mind, and too trust-

ing to her good husband, to let morbid grumbling follow such a day. Teresa thought she was weary ; so she was, of her weight of mystery.

They were to leave after breakfast the next morning ; and Mrs. Judgworth, during that meal, spoke of going with them as far as Chettington. .

"No ; stay where you are," said the captain, sternly.

"What makes you so grumpy to-day ?" asked his wife.

"Plenty," said the captain, crossly.

"So I am to stay at home ?"

"Yes, Mrs. Judgworth, you are."

"Do tell me what is the matter ?"

"What cannot be helped."

"It will do you good to tell us, papa," said Isabella.

"A convict shot this morning."

Captain Judgworth had a quick manner at all times, but he was terribly out of sorts this day.

"Do you mean suicide ?" asked Lord Bridlynton.

"No ; no chance of that, poor fellow !"

"How then ?"

"He tried to escape, and the sentry fired."

"Dear me ! was that right ?" asked Mrs. Judgworth.

"The sentry did not mean to kill him ; but it has to be done sometimes."

"Did he play tricks ?"

"Play tricks ? He tried to escape, I say."

"When ?"

"Early this morning. He thought the guards were at breakfast, and swam off : the sentry was right ; but a shot in the hand, just to stop his swimming, would have done."

"You seem much moved about this convict," said Isabella Judgworth.

"He was a fine, handsome man, about fifty-five—one of the lot for Bermuda."

Elfie sat transfixed—motionless—absolute in her will to listen, and display no feelings.

"We saw them yesterday," said Georgy. "I rather felt inclined to congratulate them on getting the variety from this triste and desolate Portness."

"He was no common person, I am con-

vinced ; but he is gone ; and I only regret it happened in my time," said Captain Judgworth.

" Was he tall ? and in the house yesterday, or the day before ? " Clara asked.

" Very possibly : he was tall and handsome ; I had remarked him once or twice. Bless me ! What now ? "

Clara had fainted.

Mrs. Judgworth and Lord Bridlynton carried her away. Lady Oakbury asked a few calm questions about the convict ; and then prepared to leave Portness. For many succeeding hours Elfie pondered. Who shall describe her position ?—but she calmed into despair at the sorrowful recollections which at times overwhelmed her, and asked, was this a strange coincidence, or the vengeance of a higher Power ?

Weary of the monotony of life in a convict state, Harrold, with his keen sight and quick perceptions, met Lady Oakbury, knowing she was a friend of Lady Bridlynton, and that she recognised him, *lost* as he was. Rash and reckless, he plunged into the black depths to escape

from the dark vault which his diseased mind spread over his days. Whether to drown were his intention, or to swim beyond the limits of the guards, and try to land once more—the vigilant sentry fired.

A coroner's inquest followed. The man met his death by a shot which entered his shoulder, the wound scarcely visible, which bled inwardly, causing exhaustion.

A verdict of "justifiable homicide" was returned, and merit given to the sentinel.

The public papers mentioned the facts, and Clara repeated her conviction; but Elfie alone bore the knowledge that the subject of the inquiry had been, Harrold, Viscount Rencliffe.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRUTH.

CLARA soon recovered her spirits ; but Lady Oakbury looked in close proximity to consumption when she got to "The Chase." The chestnut avenue was in a mist before her eyes ; her husband's words came to a clouded brain ; something operating on her system produced languor—no pleasure, and no pain.

Fresh air wearied her ; books she could not read ; too indifferent to music, she tried to play, but only mere disjointed melodies would come.

Too weak to walk, she became at last glad to be drawn about in a Bath chair, since Sir Thomas and Teresa would not let her stay in the house.

She seemed too tired to originate one idea,

and seemed to have left off thinking—or dreaming. When Mr. Meadows noticed that she met his gaze with a half-imbecile smile, he knew that she was very far gone ; but Sir Thomas's hopeful heart, and sound philosophy, kept up his spirits, and his trust that Elfie would come round again.

How this might have been but for an event which woke her up from her utterly indifferent condition, and superinduced a more cheerful frame of mind and body, cannot be told.

Sir Thomas bowed his meek head, and loved and trusted on. It was brave and good of him to do so, and he was at last rewarded.

Elfie had for some days looked vacantly at the post-bag, and seen the letters and newspapers turned out without interest, putting her share down beside her, as if to avoid the toil of reading them.

One morning there was a blue envelope, quite like other people's in appearance ; only the stamps were foreign. Sir Thomas passed it towards her. A little scream from her, and a wild clutch at the letter, and a gleam of intel-

ligence overspread her face, and, with a smile, she said,—

“ I do think it is from Harrold.”

Any man but Sir Thomas Oakbury would have been in torture : he had no fear ; his love was perfect.

She read it ; and so weak was she physically, that she fell into a heavy sleep, and the letter dropped upon the carpet beside her.

It was a crisis. The poor brain, so long overwrought, was eased. She awoke, and greeted her husband with a smile of ineffable comfort.

“ I do think I must go back to bed,” she said.

Teresa was summoned, and she slept, in a quiet doze, nearly all that day.

Towards evening there was yet enough light to see that she looked better. Sir Thomas bent over and kissed her.

“ How good you are to me. You read the letter ? ”

“ No, my dear.”

“ Why not ?—I thought you had ! ” He took it now. It bore date two months ago, from Harrold’s place in Australia.

“MY DEAR LADY OAKBURY,

“ I am sure it is a liberty to write to you ; but to whom can I announce the tidings but to you ?

“ Poor Rencliffe succumbed to fever in Africa. Many of the expedition sank under it, also ; it is a sorrowful end to all his wanderings. I never think of him without heart-ache, and regret the wishes of my mother that we should leave old England. However, as he is gone, and lies in a nameless grave in Africa, it devolves on me to try to redeem the name and fortunes of the family from actual obscurity. I have been most successful here, thank God, and shall dispose of my possessions well, for things will fetch a good price at this moment.

“ I hope to sail towards September ; and possibly Sir Thomas and I may look up a partridge together. It feels melancholy, too,—this returning to take poor Rencliffe’s place. My mother’s arguments, and fears, and constant assertions that we had not means to live at Rencliffe, and my poor brother’s wanderings and faggings in exploring such desolate portions as he chose, prove how much the anxiety of my

mother's worry actuated him. I ought not to say this to you, or to any one ; but you remember the old time at the Sheridans', and all her arguments to Rencliffe. I only feel that both are gone, and that I look to you and Sir Thomas Oakbury for the only welcome I care for. Give my regards to him, with this appeal for his friendly help.

“ Believe me,

“ Your true and faithful

“ RENCLIFFE.”

He did not waver in his faith and trust even now—the good, true heart.

“ Elfie, Harrold is very fond of you still,” he said.

“ Not in the way you mean, Sir Thomas.” She always called him so, in token of her intense respect.

“ My dear, if any one wrote on paper that you were anything but what you are, I should put the paper in the fire, and see it burn.”

“ You are so good,” she said.

“ I cannot think,” she added, after a long pause, that was filled up with Teresa bringing

her some tea, which her husband watched her drink with the utmost love and tenderness, and, when Teresa was gone, she said,—

“I cannot think it would be wrong to tell you the *secret* now, which used to weigh so heavily.”

“Just as you please, my dear. I ask for nothing more than I have—the right to love you.”

“I *will* tell you,” said Elfie, in her dear old wilful tone ; and she sat up and took his hand. There was a yearning tenderness in her eyes that must have driven away all doubt as to his wife’s affection.

He left her to reach a shawl, and then, sitting comfortably hand in hand, she began,—

“Lady Rencliffe sent for me when she was dying to lodge with me the knowledge that her husband still lived ! It was a sad story for a young girl’s ears, of profligacy and ruin, to perdition.

“Lady Rencliffe eloped with him, and he led her a sad, hard life ; but yet she, with a woman’s devotion, loved him through it all ; and upon that weakness he presumed and made her give

up all her settlement, and various things of that kind.

“Her boys were born when he had that appointment at Jamaica, and there it was supposed he died. She believed it. It was chronicled in Jamaica papers, in ‘Galignani’s,’ and the ‘Marseilles’ something; but I have them all sealed up. He was drowned yachting, so they said; and, strangely enough, it was asserted that his body was picked up and buried.

“However, three years elapsed, and he appeared at Malta, to his wife, so deeply in debt, that she had to give him all she had to prevent his being arrested. He played and lost nightly, and gloried in disguises, and, she thinks, intended to resume his name when he reached England; but the reckless gambling life he led prevented this.

“His wife, believing she alone knew of his existence, sold everything for him, and implored him to come back.

“He acted on her weakness, said he could prove his death, and threatened if she proclaimed his guilt to declare that he was only a

lover of hers. The boys grew up, and she had difficulty even to educate them as she wished and thought due to their position.

“Harrold wanted to marry me, and told her so ; and, I suppose, in her unprotected state of lonely misery she was glad to tell her sorrow and her secret to some one with a woman’s feelings. My heart has bled for her since ; it only rebelled at the time, and I used to feel myself injured and oppressed.”

“No wonder, my poor Elsie.”

“Rencliffe and Harrold, with truly filial respect, acceded to her last request—that they would leave this country for some years, and seek to retrieve the fortunes of the family. They did not know their father was the cause of the poverty. You remember how unwilling poor Lord Rencliffe was to go, but he felt it a duty to obey his mother’s wish.

“Harrold, it seems, did well.”

“And shall have his welcome,” said Sir Thomas, fervently. “My poor wife, it was much for you to bear.”

She laid her soft hand, quivering with emotion, on his head.

"But for you, it might have been most terrible. I can never repay your trusting me."

He put his arm round her, and listened with rapture to her words of love and gratitude.

"Now I must tell you the rest," she said; and in a few pithy sentences Elfie told of Lady Bridlynton's disclosure of her death, and of the end of the convict Harrold at Portness.

"No wonder you were ill, my Elfie."

"It was very hard to bear," she said; "but only think of that man, who made each woman think herself his only confidante."

"It would be improbable: only seeing is believing," said Sir Thomas.

"It appears," continued his wife, "that the poor deluded women avoided each other; both widows, he played his game upon each, bidding his wife keep her knowledge from his sister, and his sister from his wife."

"He was a very knowing hand," said Sir Thomas, smiling. "He is gone; and we may now absolve all parties, my Elfie; and believe me, there is no need to display all this to Harrold."

"I think not, indeed, if you agree."

A few days passed of unmitigated thankfulness. Lady Oakbury began to resume her colour and her occupations; went in her wheeled chair to visit the school; and even spoke of putting hyacinths very early in glasses for Christmas, otherwise she said they would not be in flower when her great party should arrive, for she intended to invite Lord Bridlynton and Clara, Mr. and Mrs. Lyne, and the Hallowbys, and the Judgworths."

"My dear, Marcus Lyne will not be able to leave at that season!"

"He may hire some one, and we will send the two guineas! Then, remember Harry and his pretty Jessie will be at Carsall by that time."

"Yes, so they will; and Mrs. Herbert?"

"My mother will spend the rest of her days at Pau."

"Until she becomes invested with the dignity of grandmamma," said Sir Thomas; "then I suspect we shall find her at Carsall."

The Rector and Mr. Meadows were at dinner.

"So Lord Rencliffe is coming home?"

"Yes, and I mean to have a wedding-breakfast here for him some day," said Elfie.

Sir Thomas gave a little stare.

"I think," she added, "in time, Constance Somerton will suit him to perfection. We must be very discreet, and let it all come of its own accord ; but I am quite resolved, and, after Harrold settles, we shall have quite a lively neighbourhood."

"You have arranged it all, I see."

"Yes, Mr. Meadows, and when did a woman's *good* wishes fail ? Love is a fine thing, and so is devotion. I am devoted to Harrold Rencliffe's interests, and promised his dying mother to look after him ; and if I give him Constance, her fondest wishes will be realised."

"Well, I quite agree with you, Lady Oakbury. Miss Somerton is most charming."

"And so is Harrold," she said, for she had faith in him. "He and Constance at Rencliffe Hall—my brother Harry and his wife——"

"I shall enlarge my church," said the Rector.

"Mr. Meadows, I invite you to join our winter assembly, for it will need some arrange-

ment. You will have Mrs. Hallowby to take charge of; she was a great ally of poor Lady Alice Somerton."

"I know her and the Judgworths, too!"

"Isabella will, in time, marry Charles Somerton, I am sure."

"Elfie, you are looking onwards."

"Not so very far. Isabella is a good girl, and the young Somertons used to be a great deal at the Grange. By the way, I think Constance might come to us at once; why wait till cold weather sets in? for Mary Somerton wants nobody but Mrs. Skipton."

Elfie fatigued herself day after day with plans for everybody's comfort; but her health only improved with such fatigue.

Her mind was quite at rest; a season of peace and tranquillity came upon her, which, in its sweetness, fully compensated for the trials which her miserable secret had produced.

During many a morning's stroll, the coincidences would pass through her mind—her former love for Harrold—his mother's sad, broken-hearted life. It was now no wonder to her that Elma dreaded her sons becoming

acquainted with London life, lest they should meet him whose self-banishment was the destruction of her comfort.

But the life of an adventurer was preferable to him, and he chose to sail along the tide of life separately from the fleet in which he ought to have borne company.

The identification of the stranger in Lea Wood with the man she had seen in Regent Street, and then the sight of him at Bridlynton, and the fatal visit there, would produce a shudder.

His daring, too, in returning to both poor women for supplies, when in turn he found either unable to assist him. His haunts were never explored, and it is likely that he reckoned upon his movements with such entire knowledge, both of London and human nature, that he could at any time confidently choose the safest place to hide in.

Elfie read one morning, in a public journal, these words: "Not long ago, the law reports brought out the story of a respectable father of a family, who, prompted by some unknown cause, left his home, and lived for five-and-

twenty years in a street not very far off, without ever being met or recognised by any of his friends or kindred. In a novel, such an incident would be called absurd ; yet we believe it to be much less impossible than it appears at first sight."

" If," thought Lady Oakbury, " the writer of that paragraph could know the fate of Lord Rencliffe, whose fits of angry passion caused his wife distress, whose reckless extravagance made havoc with his fortune, whose mad career seemed never to terminate, for he was reported dead, and yet returned to prey upon both his wife and sister ; each living almost unknown to the other by reason of their secret, for, sad and strange as it was, neither suspected that the other knew the fate of the husband and brother ; if," she repeated, " his case were known, it would surely not be believed. My husband is right, we will veil the memory of his father to Harrold by simply accepting Harrold's own belief, and not divulging the fact that he was not drowned, according to Galignani, off the West Indies. Poor Elma, I shall never see her grave without feeling how firm must have been my

good Sir Thomas's belief in better things, when he could hope against hope, and bear all he did bear with me, and love me still."

The little soliloquies did her good ; she opened to the blessed influences around, changed her mind on many subjects ; and friend, acquaintance, and neighbour, man, woman, and child acknowledged a peculiar charm ; for Elfie had a heart at rest.

Constance arrived to bear her company, and the fine autumnal days were very bracing. Elfie grew strong, and her youth came to her as it should have been before, with a keen relish for music, light; flowers, and beauty.

Mr. Meadows took credit to himself for having improved her taste in music ; she played with feeling and fine expression now, and exhibited at his musical entertainment with admirable effect.

" You must give us ' Suoni la tromba ' again, Lady Oakbury."

She smiled and complied, and let him accompany her. The good Rector was half inclined to flatter himself, that the society of wise men had affected her. She liked him very

much, but his self-gratulations would have been fallacious ; it came all from within, and that caused her to enjoy his presence, as she did all her husband's visitors, indicating thereby the happiness which wanted nothing.

It was a bright, clear, sparkling day, late in the Indian summer which had come with its rose and lilac tints over the changing woods, and falling chestnut trees, that Elfie and Constance sat at work—for it had become one of her accomplishments to use a needle ; it was a reformation of which Constance was wordy in approval.

They were very busy, and their voices flowed like a spring in the flowery sunshine, with a sweet soft flow, bursting only now and then into a sort of rustling murmur, all telling a long story by intonation of happy life in verdant meadows, and pleasant pastures ; for the minds fed on flowery meads and yet strong food, in the way of literature—the low soft flow stopped——

A tall man entered the room ; he was in the prime of life, erect and handsome. Sir Thomas was with him.

“ Elfie, here is Lord Rencliffe ! ”

The strong man clasped her in his arms for one moment, and kissed her with the fond affection of a returning brother.

“ Oh, Harrold ! I am so glad to see you,” she said : “ now let me introduce my friend Miss Somerton.”

This was their meeting : and this, the meeting of Harrold and Constance.

If Sir Thomas Oakbury had a throbbing pulse, one cannot be surprised. In metaphor his winter was over, the snow all gone, the trees in blossom, and a bright May morning dawned.

Harrold was there. Cheerful days in store, springing hopes and sweet convictions, that he had not “ loved abundantly ” in vain.

THE END OF A DOUBLE SECRET.

GOLDEN PIPPIN.

CHAPTER I.

DORA.

WHAT a strange uncertain pilgrimage is human life! A sad and silent one to some men, without mutual confidence or companionship; with others, a gay pleasure trip, to all appearance, with every attribute to please the senses, and to hush memory, if troubles ever have assailed the latter traveller; and in spite of his smiling countenance and joyous voice, depend upon it there is, nevertheless, a dark spot to be hidden, as every human being has.

Again we come upon an individual who has passed his earlier years with credit, and yet in consequence of some sudden, violent, uncontrolled fit of rage and passion, or some yielding to the fierce temptation which most easily beset

him, ends in a trial, with all the publicity of a court of justice, and receives sentence, perchance, ten years' penal servitude, and so his journey is continued, broken from its first original path.

Before our eyes now comes a man with a bald head, large red cheeks, eyes shaded by long, wild-looking eyebrows, his chin surrounded with a fringe of mingled red and white, large whiskers, but of a kind denominated *scrubby*, and his whole exterior denoting weedy old age, with scarcely one amiable propensity. His eyes gleam with a fierce expression of greediness, and yet there is weakness in his look, as if he had not sufficient firmness to hold what he had graspingly acquired. There is so much of bad quality in his appearance that it is difficult to apply the thought of boyhood, and an age of innocence, to him.

Yet this man had a childhood too, long ago, and played with toys, and wore his hair in fair curls, over a clear, pale brow, and his eyes were of the blue of heaven, and for a time he floated happily along the stream of human life; but he grasped the wrong branch, and clung too

hard, after the wave of boyhood flowed away, to the shore which promised gold and pleasure, instead of the opposite one which only spoke of patience and hard work, and of a distant hour of well-requited toil. Men all float about for a little time in a sort of bay of uncertainty. Many find it hard to decide upon a profession, so numerous are the difficulties and drawbacks that present themselves. They usually succeed who decide quickly, and *stick* to their decision.

There are green banks, and mossy dells, and charming vistas on the shores of this bay, as well as rugged, rocky paths, each promising a desirable end. The choice is hard to make; few youths would choose the green spots, were they to learn they would get no further. A few, truly, are willing to pass their days in a small flower garden, and content themselves with small pleasures, and the certainty of lack of care, but most desire enterprise and promotion. These choose the harder landing-places, but from which they have a lengthened view of wood and mountain, sunshine and shade, and the probability of more than trifling labour in scaling the heights before they can

hope for a reward. Such emulative geniuses get on, pass each other in turn, and reach the goal. Some take the bank all covered with flowers, and very beautiful they are, in their rich and various hues, and rainbow blending of tints ; but a cold night comes suddenly and they are gone, blighted by transition from the sun's heat to a chilling frost, nipped off in their glory, not even left to go to seed ; there was nothing to shelter them, and they who lived only to gaze upon them are desolate, it is too late to overtake their companions, the tide is gone out and they are stranded. Their only chance is to climb beyond the bank of flowers over the hard cliff, seizing the rough projections, and losing blood and strength in the attempt ; some who have energy do it, and gain a high up point where they can rest, and start afresh upon life's journey ; the others cling to the hard beach, and the night treats them sorely. One has seized a bare limb and gained an overhanging tree, panted for some minutes, till, with recovered breath, his powers were sufficient, and thence with no path, but from point to point, till an eminence is reached, and he

can see in what direction lies the open sea ; hungry, weary, and travel-stained, he embarks in the first vessel, and resigns himself to his fate, as he calls it, to sink or swim.

The old man with the bald head, and now, it must be confessed, ugly face, has gone through many a phase of life, and is to present himself in his latter days to the reader with a companion who forms the strongest possible contrast to himself. Beside him stands a young girl ; but her face, fair in form and features, shows anything but happiness, and one feels that her companion is not the one she would choose if she could be allowed to follow her choice. There is a look of rebellion on her regular lips, and her small feet have almost a tendency to stamp as she considers some momentous step and resolves upon a point under consideration, as if she knew she must take care of herself, and was determined to resist his importunity. She has abundant dark hair, which hangs loosely over a mantle of frieze, and a straw hat shades her face ; but her great eyes look unhappy under it, and she speaks quickly, and with gestures, and it is clear that

she thinks herself *put upon*. They are on a road separated from the sea by a low wall ; the young lady has been bathing, and her attendant has passed on with her bathing-dress and other requisites, while she is stopped by her guardian, and ordered to walk in a contrary direction.

The country is surpassingly beautiful, a rich wood rises from the level of the sea, clothing the hillside with verdure till it seems to slant upward towards the sky, and it shelves again below the road down quite to the beach, leaving barely room for bathing at half-tide, for when fully in, the waves wash the roots of the oaks in places, and dash the spray over the ferns and brambles which grow down to the water's edge. The bank is perpendicular in parts, in others broken, and everywhere picturesque.

The girl would have revelled in the beauty of the place, but the old man, sluggish in heart and aspect, tyrannically forbade every enjoyment in his power, and seized upon this moment to prohibit future bathing, by reading or rather reciting a lecture on the extreme indelicacy of such a proceeding ; for he knew it was to her a pleasure more intense than to

others ; for she longed for freedom, and only champed the bit as she felt the trammels of his control, and impatiently listened and tried to bear his harsh words and viciously hard hits ; for he had taken pains, whilst she was enjoying her short pleasure in the water, to get up every point that he thought would tell upon the subject, and make an impression on Dora's mind. She walked by his side, and listened for a long time silently ; but her lip grew compressed, and her little foot struck the ground almost fiercely as he continued to name his absurd objections, and at last she spoke.

“ Last week you said just the same about sketching from nature.”

“ Because young ladies do these things not for the sake of the pictures they make, but for the sake of the picture they create.”

“ How can you tell that ? You mean that I was standing to be admired, instead of to draw.”

“ You see my inference is just.”

“ No, it is unjust as well as untrue. I do not care who looks at me ; besides, at half-past

nine, few people were out, except the old bathing women and fishermen."

"Female vanity is easily fed," replied the provoking old man. Dora bit her lip, but only said,—

"I am tired now, we may turn back and go home."

"Because this road is too retired for you! Walking is good for you after bathing; in fact, you ought to walk for an hour after that wilful plunge of yours into the sea."

"Very well." Dora walked on, but with a relenting step no longer; even if this road were *retired*, as he said, the unkind old man.

Killerby, another bathing-village, was within three miles, and she resolved to walk thither, and to make him go, to punish his provoking censure. He was soon tired; but Dora set foot to the ground with a will, and he kept up with her, and from time to time found some topic on which to converse with her; but each one ended with taunts on his side upon the character, wishes, failings, and even virtues of the feminine gender. Dora knew that he would not go with her to Killerby if he could

help it; neither did she care to see the busy, second-rate visitors who thronged the shore, bent upon "pleasuring" to their heart's content, for by this time the place had "woke up" to its gayest state. For once she meant to tease him; his constant annoying had weighed upon her spirits till she had grown restive.

The wood was left behind now, but some fields by the roadside presented a rich attraction in honeysuckles and other wild-trailing things, beautiful in Dora's eyes, which covered the hedges with summer beauty and gladness; and some gaudiness was outspread, where, at other seasons, only poverty appeared; for the hawthorns did not flourish, nor the shrubs which intermingled, on account of the brine-laden dashes of spray which swept over them during the equinoctial gales, and kept them only a low, stunted, one-sided fence.

Dora climbed the bank after the woodbine and large convolvuli, the blue vetch and the briony, leaving her cross-grained guardian on the dusty road. She gathered flowers enough to weave garlands if she liked, and she managed also to get far ahead, so that, when she jumped

down to the road again, she was some hundred yards in advance of him, to whom she gave a little nod, and then walked on straight towards Killerby. Her dress of dark cotton, her mantle and hat of common materials which she had purchased expressly for the bathing season, could not disguise her faultless figure and a certain well-born grace which carried conviction that Dora was a lady.

Killerby was all alive ; stalls of comestibles were set up to allure the youth of either sex, to sweetness, as to both eating and drinking ; sticks of varied coloured sweetstuff, sugar-cakes and sweetmeats, gingerbread and ginger-beer in equal proportions, all in profusion, and all likely to be sought for as numbers come in by the mid-day trains, and afternoon festivities advanced. Covered stands filled with gay calico for dresses, ribbons, flowers unlike anything the garden can produce, and tawdry lace, were placed for the attraction of the weaker ones of the so-called weak sex ; whilst tops, whips, balls, and babies' rattles, with a shrill whistle attached, produced excitement amongst the groups of children who gathered round the

stands; wooden spades and hoops were speedily bought up, as also various irresistible attractions by both boys and girls, whose mothers seemed to be liberal with their purses, for every child was eating a cake, or carrying a toy; and maidens, with finely-dressed babies in feathered hats, wildly shook rattles filled with peas, or flourished trophies of coloured paper, or displayed flags or long ribbon flying from sticks of striped devices, all talking, laughing, and enjoying the season. Windows were as wide open as they could go, and gazers staring out of each. A photographer exhibited his portraits and his gifts on the walls of a house, his splendid colouring talents and his exquisite gilt frames. A little crowd surrounds his case of pictures, and much chattering occurred when a familiar face was recognised. The "Royal Hotel" had flags flaunting on the breeze, and pots of bright geraniums on the window-ledges, and patches of yellow and orange nasturtiums, and blue convolvulus, and red poppies, in a railed-in bit of ground in front called the garden; benches were placed about; everything was as gay as it could be, and Dora, knowing she had

someone to take charge of her, walked along the esplanade, and enjoyed the variety and novelty of the scene.

In a few minutes the loud scream of a locomotive announced the arrival of a train, and extra bustle occurred; people with every variety of article in their hands jostled against her—from a real travelling-trunk to a clothes-basket, a butcher's tray, a fish hamper, or one with only a Bradshaw or a packet of sandwiches. Lastly came four or five young men, smoking cigars. One of these, to her great surprise, left his comrades and advanced to greet her.

"Miss Handon! I am delighted! Are you come to lodge here? This is a surprise;" and they shook hands warmly.

"No. I have walked from Warringdale."

"Alone? or who is with you?"

"Oh it is quite right, Charlie! Major Talbot is close behind."

"Is he here, then? and as cross as ever?"

"Oh quite; in fact, rather worse. How did you come here?"

"Sherrard and Harland asked me to come

out and spend a day at the hotel here ; it is good fun to see the visitors."

"But I mean, where do you come from, Charlie?"

"Oh, their regiment is at Naghan. I have but two days. Lord Middleton has to be in London on Monday."

"How glad I am we met."

"So am I, Dora. Broom was asking about you last week."

"Where?"

"He was at the Middletons', but is going off to South Africa immediately."

"I hope a lion will eat him there, Charlie."

"You will marry him yet, Dora."

"Well, Charlie, if Major Talbot drives me quite mad, I may,—not otherwise. Here he comes! and in his blandest mood."

So he did, saluting Charlie with honeyed words, and raising his hat to Dora in the most polite manner. Charlie Meath smiled.

"Mr. Meath, this is an unexpected pleasure. You will dine with us to-day?" said Major Talbot, in the most mellifluous of tones, and with the utmost courtesy.

"No, thank you. I fear I shall not have time to go to Warringdale. We are to dine here, and leave by the seven o'clock train."

Major Talbot was in his bland state, as Mr. Meath called it ; a state he could assume when it pleased him to act the gentleman or the man of the world. Dora knew it well, and how speedily he could change. A few minutes passed in conversation, then leave was taken, and Charlie joined his friends at the Royal Hotel.

"Who's the old courtier, Meath?" asked one.

"He is Major Talbot, guardian to my cousin, Miss Handon. Poor girl, she is not very fond of him, I believe."

"He looks like a kind of pleasant old gentleman."

"Yes, when he likes ; but he has two sides," said Charlie.

Captain Harland and Mr. Sherrard watched Dora till she disappeared with her guardian ; her form had something striking which made an impression, but it lasted only for a moment, for their friend Meath was already busy about the ordering of dinner with the landlord, and

it was a subject worthy of undivided attention to all three idlers.

Dora had left them with a smile on her face ; but in a few minutes a storm broke over her head, just as she anticipated.

“So you led me to Killerby in order to meet three young men ! I must say I was inclined at first to feel surprised at your wonderful obedience to my wishes, with respect to my suggestion about walking for an hour after bathing ; but I soon concluded you had a motive, and began to look out for it, and I find I was not mistaken. Nothing surprises me that you can do. Female mancœuvring has been my study for years. Pray, how did Mr. Meath and his friends convey the fact to you that they were to be at Killerby to-day ? Let me add, it is something too public a place for an assignation, and your toilette might have undergone a little care and arrangement.”

“You forget, Major Talbot, that Charles Meath is my cousin, and that I did not speak to either of his ‘friends,’ ” said Dora.

“I cannot suppose, young lady, that your aim was simply to meet your cousin ; but Lord

Middleton is a celebrated *parti*, and as long as he remains unmarried, every woman will try to have a throw for him."

"You attribute too much to me ; I am not so clever as you profess to think me, and you know a roundabout method would not suit my taste, Major Talbot."

"Do not think I am flattering you. Lord Middleton does not wish for your acquaintance or he could make it, I doubt not ; indeed, if he wished to have you for a wife, he would correspond by means of the post. I am not accusing him, but *you* of forwardness ; if he wrote to you, you would reply to him by 'return.'"

"I wonder if he is acquainted with that fact," said Dora, coldly ; "it might save Mr. Meath so much trouble. Perhaps it would be well if somebody led him forth and enlightened him as to the fact that there is a post."

Major Talbot grew silent. Dora would not get angry ; and in one of her moods it was diamond cut diamond. She wanted no more recrimination at this instant, so made use of her power to obtain peace for a season, and was

left to her own thoughts for the rest of the way home.

There were times when she resented his cruel misjudgings and insinuations, when her heart quite longed for freedom, and her soul panted for the term of durance to be over. The state of surveillance in which she was kept was enough to crush the animal spirits of a young girl ; and she had at times a strange, weary, old look upon her face, as if life were a solemn thing to contend with, not to enjoy ; as if a weight upon her mind damped the buoyancy of youth, and the future stood before her like a dark race to be run, with a slough of despond to be crossed over, and to dread.

CHAPTER II.

TIME AND TIDE.

Dora had no tender friends, no mother, no companion. There was some agonising remembrance of youth which prevented her mind dwelling upon it as many people do, and pondering over the happiest days of existence. Dora always shuddered when they talked before her of the golden days of childhood.

She was very handsome. None could look at her without acknowledging this ; but to all the friends of Major Talbot her manner was somewhat stern, almost forbidding, and a want of ease pervaded her sayings and doings, for she knew every word she uttered would be repeated and commented upon.

The day after the walk to Killerby, she watched the tide turn, and the groups of free,

contented bathers were envied as they passed her window ; but she sought not to join them, which surprised her maid, who knew how she enjoyed a dip in the sea.

“The water is lovely to-day, miss ; will you not bathe ? I have everything ready.”

“Thank you, Batting, Major Talbot said so much about it yesterday, I hardly like to risk another scolding.”

“Dear lady, what difference will that make ? he will find something else, sure to goodness ! Cook had to speak out finely to him this morning, and he is gone to his own room now quiet enough ; he was so carnaptious——”

“So what ?” said Dora, smiling.

“Well, miss, it’s the same as Mr. Charles used to call cantankerous. He gave it to cook right and left ; so at last she had to give him just a little in return, or else he would have had to get another cook this very day to stand his worry and his interference.”

“I hope cook was not impertinent,” Dora began ; but Major Talbot entered the room at that instant.

“Exactly as I suspected! A fit of female gossip has come upon you, and that garrulous woman, Mrs. Batting, alone can satisfy and please! Young lady, a becoming distance would be more suitable in your intercourse with your servants and inferiors. Such persons as Mrs. Batting are simply necessary evils, and are not intended to be the guides and companions of youth! How am I to interpret your preferring to remain indoors on so fine a day?”

“The interpretation, sir, is not difficult. You forbid me to sketch or to bathe. I hate to go out without a motive,” said Dora.

“Precisely; I am never far wrong. Your motive yesterday was to meet Mr. Charles Meath and his friends, so you walked to Killyerby; to-day there is no need to go out.”

“Do not provoke me, Major Talbot: I do not wish to speak to you disrespectfully.”

“And thereby incur the censure of Lady Meath!”

Dora gave a little groan, and sprung from her seat.

“There is no harm then in bathing?”

"Feminine discretion should be equal to instinct. Animals do not bathe."

"I beg your pardon, they do." And Dora left the drawing-room hastily, and within ten minutes was splashing in the waves, and relishing a short respite from tyranny in any form, she gave herself ten minutes extra in the water, as Batting entertained her with,—

"I am glad you came, miss; it does one good to see you enjoy yourself bathing, and it is very good for you, miss. Bless me! why you are a regular mermaid! There, don't you go too far! Come, not again! Dear me! there now! dear me! come, Miss Dora!" But she did not come, and Batting changed to a minor key, and grew vexed and frightened, and was ready to cry with anxiety, when her charge at length did emerge from the salt water.

"Now look at your fingers, miss, as blue as a bilberry! Oh! if the major catches us this time, he may grumble in earnest. Dear me, you shiver! you have been in too long! Goodness me, Miss Dora, if you take cold!"

"Nonsense, my good Batting, I am quite

warm, all in a glow ; look at my hands ! Besides, I feel convinced we shall go away soon. I may not even bathe again, and it is so very nice."

"Well, you have a fine circulation truly ; why, anybody else would be cold, and you are warm."

Batting talked all the time she dressed her mistress, then proposed to take home the things and walk with her.

"Miss Handon is wanted, please," said the servant who opened the door. "There are visitors waiting for her in the drawing-room."

"What a pity !" But she had to arrange her dress in haste and appear. Major Talbot was bland again. The uninitiated might believe him to have the gentlest of tempers, as he had the softest voice. He had kept the visitors waiting to see "his dear ward, who would be so much disappointed at missing them," &c., and his face, covered with smiles, assumed what Charlie Meath called "its company aspect" for half-an-hour, and lost its usual ungainliness.

Dora was self-possessed, but never gracious.

She did not care for her two-faced guardian, and for very few of his acquaintances, as before said, though every one admired her, and thought she must be fortunate in having so tender and affectionate a guardian as Major Talbot.

“I do not think,” said Mrs. Roberts to Mr. Horne, the curate, after leaving the house, “you seem to like Major Talbot as much as we do, Mr. Horne. We always feel so glad when we hear he is coming to Warringtondale, and he seems so anxious about that beautiful Miss Handon. Tell me, do you not like him? and why?”

“It is not right to say one likes or dislikes a neighbour, Mrs. Roberts; but I always distrust so very specious a manner as that of Major Talbot. I feel there must be something to hide.”

Mr. Horne was intimate enough with the Robertses to say what he thought, and the words were remembered by Mrs. Roberts after long years, and proved how truly Mr. Horne had judged of a character that was full of deception.

Sunday came, and its repose was broken in upon by a wrangle which the major entered into with each of the three women servants.

Dora retreated to her own room, but was not free even there, for one or another was sent with messages invented to destroy her quiet. When the church-bells rang out, she put on her bonnet, and fled from the sound of discord to partake alone of harmony. Her thoughts were soon devoted to her duties at church, and she forgot her discomfort, till after the service was concluded, and she reached home and found the door locked, and no one replied to her knocking and repeated rings for admission.

It was too absurd and too humiliating to stand there knocking any longer, so she left the apparently empty abode and went to the Lodge, choosing rather to seek shelter from Mrs. Roberts, than to abide the gaze of all who passed by, any longer.

Mrs. Roberts' family were going into the parlour for luncheon, and the children's dinner, in order to be ready for afternoon service at three o'clock. They welcomed her kindly.

"I could not get in," said Dora, "after ringing for a long time ; so I have ventured to ask your charity."

"We are very glad to see you. Come with me and take off your bonnet. Henry, settle the children and begin," said Mrs. Roberts ; and her orders were obeyed, for Dora found Mr. Horne and five children well employed when they entered the room. Kind, portly Mr. Roberts made it a rule that the curate of the period should always spend Sunday at his house, and anyone else who chose to appear at luncheon was gladly received.

Dora seemed well disposed to them and their society, and some of her stiffness must have vanished, for the young Robertses spoke to her freely, and more than once Mr. Horne laughed in his usual hearty manner when she replied to them.

"How I wish they would lock you out every Sunday, Miss Handon," said Mr. Roberts.


"I should not mind," she replied, frankly.

"Mamma, Dr. Morton is coming up the avenue," said Frances, "shall I go to him."

"Do, Frances ; I will come soon." And as

the girl left the room, Dora saw how lame she was. Dora could not make remark or inquiry, but thought over what accident could have caused it, as she ate her fruit. Frances had met with a serious fall, and for a long time had suffered severely, and but for the skill of Dr. Morton, she must have lost her leg. His indefatigable care, and her patience, were both largely praised by Mr. Horne, who was yet telling particulars to Dora, when the invalid party returned. Doctor Morton took a chair beside Frances, and also beside Dora; he was introduced to Miss Handon, and as their eyes met for the first time, each felt some extraordinary thrill, a sensation of earnest, eager interest, each that in the other's eyes was something to be fathomed. Dora cast down hers, which were yet glistening after the particulars of the patience of Frances, and the skill of her friend. Dr. Morton had thought himself a physiognomist, but now he felt puzzled.

He was very handsome, but with small features, and was small in stature, all but feminine in some respects, with a hand soft and fine like a woman's, and a lip that looked as if



it could quiver with deep emotion ; his voice had a touch of delicacy amounting to melancholy, but his words were cheery and bright.

“Frances is going on well?” asked Mr. Roberts.

“Very well, and is quite a heroine over it all. We shall spoil her, in fact,” said Dr. Morton, with a smile which broke over his face, and was responded to in hers.

Mrs. Roberts and he talked of various people, and Mr. Horne and Mr. Roberts were busy, and the children spoke to each other ; but Dora subsided into her coldest mood, her most tranquil, phlegmatic of moods. She listened to his observations, or replied with courtesy when addressed, but her words were few, and as if her heart was in another sphere. Dr. Morton could not read her character ; her face presented only a mask to him. Could he have felt her pulse he might have found a different story, but she was not a patient. She read his, however, and knew exactly all his worth that moment, and quietly watched the play of his features ; and once he detected a flash from

her large eyes, and he felt as if his brain was illumined, but he grew cautious, stolid in her company, and for once evinced want of feeling and sympathy.

The impressions on the mind of Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, which formed themselves as they were spectators of these changes, were put into inward ejaculations, such as "Miss Handon is very proud! I can hardly forgive her for being so stiff to our good doctor. She treats him as if he were dirt under her feet! I hope he will not mind such coldness from a guest!"

Mr. Horne saw the thing in another light, and said to himself, "Poor doctor! he will have heart complaint after this, and no cure for it!"

"I must break up this *séance*," thought the doctor himself; "it becomes distressing. Who will have a walk before afternoon church. Are you going to preach, Mr. Horne?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Then we will not ask you, or disturb your texts. Edmond and I will take a turn by the shore, and see if that Dutch-built schooner is

ready to sail, after which I must go to Killerby."

So Dr. Morton and the elder boy went ; Mr. Horne took leave, and Frances told the younger children she would see them to the nursery as she went to her own room, so Dora only followed Mrs. Roberts to the drawing-room. Her hostess could not quite forgive her for being so frigid towards Doctor Morton, and she knew that something had grown up between them suddenly—as suddenly as Jack's beans must have sprung into existence. The bean-stalks in Dora's case were no help to anything ; conversation would not flow, questions and answers followed with visible effort on either side, and it was a relief when church time came again.

The beautiful evening service concluded, Dora said,—

"I may take leave now with many thanks, for I must hasten back ; if Major Talbot is at home he will be sure to meet me." She said this to prevent anyone going with her.

"We shall be glad to see you at any time."

"Thanks ; but our stay at Warringdale is so very uncertain this year," Dora replied.

"Have you finished the mountain sketch which Mr. Horne tells me you began so successfully."

"No ; I was forbidden to go out again."

The children joined them, and as Mrs. Roberts watched Dora walk away, she remembered how Mr. Horne spoke with enthusiasm of her rapid method of sketching in water colours, and how he seemed to admire her. Then she thought whether his admiration were likely to prove of a lasting kind, and she gave much consideration to that subject, for she liked Mr. Horne, and would have seen him settled, with Dora as his wife, contentedly enough. She did not see that her other friend, Dr. Morton, was stricken with love at first sight, or that Dora Handon was "over head and ears" in reciprocal case.

CHAPTER III.

FREEDOM.

DORA hastened on, but James Roberts caught her, and she accepted his escort because she could not help it. Mr. Horne hurried from the vestry, but was too late ; however he found Mr. Roberts, and so returned with him to the Lodge.

Dora wanted to be alone with her own thoughts, and bade good-bye to her boy companion as soon as they were in sight of Major Talbot's abode, for she dreaded also an ebullition of wrath from her guardian, or red eyes of the weeping maids being exposed to a mischievous lad of twelve years old ; the cook especially had alternate fits of a lachrymose nature, in turn with impertinent ones. No one answered her knock at the door for some

minutes, and she began to be afraid all was not right ; her patience diminished so much that she pulled the bell with such violence that cook had to appear with swollen eyes, a dirty cap, and every evidence of a domestic disturbance having roused her anger.

“ Where is Batting ? ”

“ Gone to bed, miss.”

“ Gone to bed ? ” repeated Dora.

“ Yes, indeed, and the housemaid too.”

“ Then pray desire her to get up and bring in tea,” said Dora, not choosing to ask for reasons.

“ Indeed, Miss Dora, only for you, I would have been off these premises to-day ; as it is, the major is gone himself ; he says he cannot spend his life looking after womankind any longer.”

“ Did he leave any note or message for me ? ”

“ Yes, indeed, he did, in the parlour, and said plenty too, that you have no right to stand, miss.”

“ Never mind that ; call Batting.”

“ She is not fit to stir with her head, miss.”

"How so? what is the matter? headache?"

"No; the blows the master gave her?"

"Oh cook! I cannot believe that."

"It is true; he was just mad after your going to church in your white bonnet, and asked Mrs. Batting who you were hoping to meet, and she, meaning to go to church too, took no notice, but let him rail on, till he followed her into your room, and she begged him to go out; but he took up all the letters on your table, miss, and kept peering into them, and Batting got afraid she should be late for church, so she signed to Ann to come in and watch him, whilst she went to get ready, and he saw it all in the glass over the chimney-piece, and put himself in a towering rage in truth, and told Batting to be off with herself; so she told him he had no right to interfere with her, and he should not pull your things about, for you were her mistress, and he might leave your room, and with that he turned and flung Ann against the piano, and next, miss, he caught Batting, and whether he knocked her head against the wall, or dragged her down-

stairs, I do not know, but I know he was in an awful passion, and if it had not been Sunday, I should have gone for the police, but those two went to bed, and I gave them first some gruel and then some tea."

"And where is Major Talbot?"

"Gone, miss; I gave him warning, and he just packed a few things, and made me go for a cab from Danson's, and I suppose he's gone for good. He left a line for you, and I am sure you are well quit of him."

"Hush, cook! now get tea ready."

Cook vanished to her own regions.

"Passionate old man!" said Dora to herself. "What am I to do with these infuriated women? though I dare say they make the utmost of the case; it is a disagreeable affair. I must try to restore peace."

It took a long time. Cook was not dressed; she could not take in tea, dinner there had not been, in that day's confusion, so Ann and Bating at length got up, each declaring she was very ill, and Dora was relieved when she saw their faces complete in features; there were neither black eyes nor broken noses to speak

against the ill-treatment of their master ; neither did she lavish sympathy upon them, for she could not answer for how far they might have gone to provoke the irascible old gentleman, or how slight a touch on his part it might have taken "to hurl Ann right against the piano," or "to knock Batting down the whole length of the staircase," when they were in the humour to go.

Dora put away her white bonnet, and handsome shawl, her gloves, parasol, boots, and church service, with due deliberation, and fortified herself with a cup of tea before she ventured to open the letter addressed to herself in Major Talbot's crabbed hand.

"Miss Handon will have the goodness to be circumspect in her conduct and appearance for an uncertain number of hours, as her guardian has received a notification that his presence is required in Dublin."

Dora rather gloried in the sensation of freedom at this moment, and gave herself up to the pleasure of it, only hoping he would not

come back in his usually sudden manner, by a late train, or a very early one.

Warringdale was within a few hours of Dublin, quite an easy journey ; and she wished he had gone to London, or somewhere more distant, instead. It would be something to get a week of repose, even two or three days, so she breathed freely, and notwithstanding the subdued grumbling of the servants, she acknowledged to herself that this Sunday was a very welcome one. She even put a tiny mark against it in her pocket-book, and after tea she sat looking at the woods and the rippling sea, in a sort of delicious reverie. She had a glimpse of what life could be, of what some girls, some women could feel, but she was like no one else, her lot was cast in a different mould, unlike any others. Dreams and visions brighter than daylight came to her brain all night, flitted like some delightful imagery, but all came to an end with next morning's post ; delusions vanished, and her plans too for quiet days at Warringdale. Her days there at all were over, and the very chance of her promised repose ; she must bid

farewell to it as her home, but she might also bid farewell to Major Talbot ; she must get up, and move about, and pack, and sail for England at the earliest moment.

A day or two ago she would have seized upon this as a welcome respite from her tormenting guardian. Now she was not glad to go, and in vain she tried to persuade herself to feel so. Her arrangements must be made, however ; so she set to work and made them. Her letter to Major Talbot was as laconic as if he himself had penned it :—

“DEAR SIR,

“You will be surprised to find that I am gone. Batting is with me. I leave Lady Meath’s letter.

“Yours respectfully,

“DORA HANDON.”

Dora finished all her packing before she breakfasted. She could not eat with her excitement, or help feeling a strange sorrow over her preparations. She had little time to spare, for she had to leave with her maid at noon.

She passed through Dublin, but only drove from one station to the other, and sailed from Kingstown to Holyhead by the mail packet.

Major Talbot, if he had business, despatched it quickly, for he returned early on Tuesday ; and the yet indignant cook and housemaid had pleasurable feelings in announcing the departure of his young ward. They hoped he would experience a pang of remorse, and have stings of conscience about his harsh treatment of her, and at any rate that he would feel that his conduct had been the cause of it, until her sudden journey could be explained. Did they think he would be sorry then at having driven her to seek a distant shelter ? they must have been disappointed at his exclamation when they told him.

“Thank heaven !” said he. “You women can both move off to-morrow. I will pay all demands to-day, and be quit of this cursed place.”

He took a hasty meal, then drove to Naghan, and they concluded he went to the bank, for he came back with his pockets full of

"change," and he paid them in full, and one or two trifling sums besides, so how could they tell that he left all the larger bills? A hasty leave was taken of one or two friends; orders given to a house-agent to let the house, and dispose of the furniture "even at a loss." So he spoke of his anxiety to get back to Dublin, and by the last train on Wednesday morning, from Killerby, Major Talbot, with his personal luggage, was seen to depart.

Everybody did not know that the agent had to take arrears of rent, and other matters from the amount of the value of said furniture; however, strangers were soon in possession, and no one recollected why or how others had left the house for the occupation of the present tenants, Warringdale being a favourite resort of strangers.

The news of Dora's departure struck heavily upon one heart, and that heart was Dr. Morton's. It would have been life to him to know that she suffered a sharp, brief agony on looking her last at the place of their meeting, and that she shed a few bitter tears; but Dora

had learnt to bear silently, and he to act ; so he worked and worked, and visited the sick, and comforted them as before.

Melville Morton's elder brother inherited a fine place and large fortune on the death of his father, but small provision was made for the mother, two daughters, and a younger son. Impressed with the justice of the law of primogeniture, the elder thought it no affair of his to provide for the younger branches, since his father was satisfied to leave the world without having done so. Mrs. Morton retired to Cheltenham with her girls, and lived in "genteel penury." Melville, the second son, would have acted differently, but he came too late upon the stage of life to do anything for his mother, but evince a noble self-denial. He learnt all that his tutors could teach him, spent less at college than any young man of his year, and took a good degree at Cambridge. Circumstances, which he seized upon, brought him into the notice of a celebrated physician, and by one piece of good luck after another, his education and examination passed with the greatest *éclat*. Mrs. Morton did not "like her

son to be a doctor," she feared it was derogatory to the Morton dignity, but Melville knew that he must live, and in choosing an honourable profession, he felt he might have means to help his mother and sisters. Still that mother could hardly thank him for his exertions ; she was too proud to acknowledge that, high as he promised to be in his profession, it could be a benefit. She told him, had he chosen the church or the bar, it would have pleased her better. She continued her house at Cheltenham, and though she received frequent gifts from Melville, she yet coldly refrained from acknowledging that she was pleased. Charlotte and Laura were fashionable and well-dressed, and visited and danced in fresh ball-dresses, and flowers of their own making. They would have gladly sacrificed their gaiety for a comfortable home ; but their mother cared not for their opinion, and only wished them to marry well ; but husbands were hard to find, who were willing to take penniless girls. At last Charlotte married an elder clerk in a bank in London, whose wife died at Cheltenham, and he was dazzled with her appearance. Charlotte had

good sense, and made an excellent mother for his children ; but a breach was made, across which Mrs. Morton would never hear of a bridge being formed. Charlotte went to London, having seen her mother and Laura for the last time. They, or the former in particular, talked of poor Charlotte's *més-alliance*, and no correspondence was kept up. At intervals, through Melville, news was conveyed ; but not otherwise. To have a son in the medical profession, and a daughter in the city, were too much for Mrs. Morton's pride, for pride and poverty are apt to go together, and she could not see how Charlotte preferred a sensible husband and useful life, to her days at Cheltenham. Laura pined for her sister, and Mrs. Morton chafed under her self-inflicted sorrows, till she resolved upon hiding herself from the world, as she said, and chose Boulogne as her retreat, for she could not give up her beloved "society," nor her hope of a brilliant match for Laura.

The elder Mortons, for the heir married a short time after coming into his property, lived very much abroad, and recklessly squandered

their income, having no sort of compunction in washing their hands of the rest of the family; and after a few years' of hard work, Melville's health broke down, and by the time he was able to resume his practice others had crept in, and his patients were so diminished, that he gave up, and determined to take the advice of Dr. Stockmann, his friend, and try the soft air of Ireland for his own complaint, and mind his own constitution for a little longer. So Dr. Morton came to Warringdale, where he soon grew strong, and where eventually he took up his abode, and made a tolerable income for himself amongst the residents, as well as the numerous visitors, both there and at Killerby. Nor did Dr. Stockmann desert him, but rather, on his account, made the fortunes of Warringdale lodging-house keepers, since he recommended many and many a sufferer to place themselves there under Dr. Morton's care. In all the years of his life, which now amounted to four and thirty, Melville had never truly loved. He was gracious and pleasing to many, and sensible to kindness and amiability, but the meeting with

Dora opened a new light in his soul, and he sorrowed after her as he had never done for woman before.

And Major Talbot? He was not seen or heard of for months; at least, he could never be found by any one who wanted him. His life was filled with mysteries, and as a great portion was spent in hiding from his creditors, his habits had become so strong that it is not to be wondered at that such necessary periods of oblivion, for a space, were more and more frequent. For the present, too, he was free of Warringdale, having Dora off his hands, so no news was looked for there of his movements.

CHAPTER IV.

CHARLIE MEATH.

CHARLIE MEATH had found his day at Killerby full of amusement, and the dinner at the "Royal Hotel" of a better and more refined description than he expected ; but he found the proprietor was in communication with a Liverpool Carrying Company, and the best provisions and earliest delicacies found their way to the cuisine of the establishment.

Besides this, a rival house had commenced operations lately at Warringdale, with the amicable intention of ruining the Killerby one ; so the two vied with each other, and outdid in the excellence of its cooking what the other professed. The officers stationed at Naghan profited in either case, as they were sure of a "good feed." Both hotels likewise

opened boarding-houses, and both plied a good trade ; favour at one time deciding for one, but soon chopping round to the other, according to the season, for a while, till at length it came to be known that the Killerby hotel was too cold to winter in, whereas Warringdale was well sheltered by woods from the wind, and in a few years the "Royal Hotel" at Killerby "closed on the first of November, to re-open under the same distinguished patronage as formerly upon the first of May."

Charles Meath was fond of Ireland and its people, and having become private secretary to his relative, Lord Middleton, for the sake of having something to do, he was frequently for many months together in the Emerald Isle, and his frank ways and honest face spoke to the warm-hearted people for his genuine, kind heart. No one enjoyed their ready wit more than did Charlie. Light of heart himself, he could understand their character better than some of his more grumbling English brethren, who mistake for levity what is truly only the contented gay character shining through. Office work and letter writing did not suit him ; had

there been too much for him to do he would have thrown up his place ; but, as there was little more than the name of work, and his office was little better than a sinecure, he kept it, as it suited him exactly. He always spoke as if his inclination had been thwarted, and his road in life warped ; he told how he wanted to go to sea, but how his mother used to oppose him. Truly, could he have entered the navy without examination, and have owned a beautiful pleasure-boat or gaily-rigged yacht, he might have found his taste suited, with a good wide berth, or standing bed-place ; but to sleep in a hammock, or keep a night-watch, would never have suited Charlie, any more than the study of navigation, gunnery, or seamanship. So he went about the world with Lord Middleton, always declaring that he was a sailor spoiled, and that her Majesty had lost a very superior and active officer in consequence of mistaken maternal solicitude !

He was in the right place with Lord Middleton, who found him faithful and useful in small things, willing to do anything within his power, and his lordship fathomed him easily,

and liking him, never put him to cope with matters beyond his depth. Lord Middleton was one of the proudest men in Europe. He could trace his descent from a very early period, and gloried in certain old signatures and parchments which proved his origin, and traced the long line of his forefathers from the earliest days of Norman history ; he was proud of being noble, and not of one of England's *en-nobled* families, as he said. They talked of his finding difficulties in taking unto himself a wife, and said his determination was not to ally himself with one who could not give his heir as long and uninterrupted a registry as his own, and the like dignities being hard to find, he and his large fortune remained unallied, though ladies by the score had shown themselves willing to compete for such a prize. Some affirmed that he was privately married, for a certain faultless carriage had been made to order and sent to Paris, which must have been for a lady of high station ; and so it was, though neither for his wife nor for any relation of his ; but how little serves to raise a report. The said carriage was for the beautiful Clotilde

de Marigny, whose husband, a great man and minister of France, and friend of Lord Middleton, ordered the carriage, and between them arranged the *cadeau* of the lady.

There was one lady who proved a sore temptation, daughter of an Irish house as ancient as his own, but the lovely lady Michella was a Roman Catholic, and had received her education at the Ursuline convent near Cork, where beautiful daughters of Irish nobility are sometimes sent to be taught and guarded by the nuns. They had certainly taught Lady Michella to sing like an angel, if indeed dame nature did not commit that talent to her when entering the world, and an Italian master too did something towards perfecting it.

Noble and beautiful, accomplished and gay, Charles Meath only hovered near and saw that his friend took in her wondrous charms ; for Charlie's own self, if he had dared to aspire to such a glorious creature, here would have been his beau idéal ; but he would about as soon have thought of making love to the holy Virgin herself, or to St. Catharine, or one of the other saints.

Lady Michella sang for Lord Middleton, but she told stories of Irish wit, and anecdotes of character to Mr. Meath, with something which made him love Irish traits all the more from her lips.

The uninitiated will not surely suppose that she told with anything like accent or brogue these stories—far from it ; her own intonation and pronunciation were perfect, there is no English more pure than that used by the higher classes in Ireland, both as to grammar and tone. And, with the common people, it must be remembered that English is a taught language, and the schools are careful to teach it well. Lady Michella had paid a long visit at Lord Andingdron's, near Naghan, and everybody believed she would go away engaged to Lord Middleton ; but she left, and Charlie heard orders given for a speedy return to England. No more did he hear.

"We shall be desolate, my lord," said an old retainer, now you are all going."

"What are you laughing at, Meath?" for Lord Middleton saw Charlie's lip curl into smiles.

“Only the word ‘desolate’ reminded me of the story Lord Andingdron told yesterday about the man who murdered his father and mother and prayed the court to have mercy upon a ‘desolate orphan’ after he was condemned to death.”

“I dare say he would not appeal in vain ; they tell queer stories, however, in Ireland, and you seem to listen to them all.”

“Indeed, my lord, the young gentleman is worthy of them. Good luck to you both, and a speedy return.”

“And the blessings of heaven be about you,” said a beggar woman, as the car drove away, and she stooped to pick up a shilling, which made her prayers flow for the travellers for blessings both here and hereafter, and for perfect rest in the world to come.

Charles Meath was very sorry to leave Ireland ; he liked merry folk and pleasant cheer, and he would now have to pay a short visit to a certain place called home, which did not agree so well with his feelings.

CHAPTER V.

ETHEL.

EIGHTEEN years before the day on which we first saw Miss Handon walking on the road by the beautiful shores of Warringdale Bay, she was a tiny infant, lying on the lap of a very fair young mother. The baby's eyes were large and fine, with a wise earnest look beyond their age, and the little face was grave, as if care to come was casting its shadows before. The mother was grave also, and big tears dropped one after the other on the long white robe of the little daughter. This mother was only nineteen, with girlish features, but a sad expression, not usual in a young wife with her first-born on her knee. She was alone but for her baby, and for a long time silent ; a dreamy look was upon her, not disturbed by the child,

but it partook of the *absorbed* and meditative nature of its parent. It did not fidget, or require movement or sound, neither did it appear disposed to cry after the manner of babies generally.

It was nearly dark when a noise in the hall attracted attention, and the lady dried the last tear which left her eye, so that no trace should be discovered on her cheek, and took the child into her arms as if half ashamed to let it lie any longer on its back, in the almost forgotten state it had been for the last half hour.

"Ethel, do not be so boisterous," said a severe voice. But Ethel burst into the room, and her doing so jarred on the nerves of the hitherto mute infant, and it set up a little wail.

"Shall I ring for nurse?" asked the intruder, loudly.

"Do please, Ethel," replied the step-mother.

"We have had a fine long walk, only papa says——"

"Papa says, Go away with nurse, you are too noisy for Mrs. Handon, and too rough," said her father, coming in.

"She is quite well now, and I want to tell

her something, and I do hate to be sent away with nurse."

"Go with nurse, Ethel," repeated her father; and Ethel went, wofully against her will, and pulled the door after her so as to make its bang resound through all the quiet house. Nurse's voice was next heard in expostulation, followed by a scream of terror from the baby. Then Colonel Handon mounted the stairs and gave a severe reprimand, and the tones of the governess, both in entreaty and authority, could be heard before the tumult subsided.

Young Mrs. Handon's tears fell again, and her husband, a man after middle age, came back to soothe her.

"If Ethel does not improve I will send her from home; she is growing quite unmanageable."

"I hope I shall be stronger soon," said his wife. "I think she is fond of me; do let me have the charge of her, she would be happier than she is with Miss Sheppard, who tries her temper too much."

"Nonsense, my dear Helen, she is as tall as

you are now, and so robust, I should not feel it safe to leave you at her mercy."

"I am not afraid. I like Ethel; but Miss Sheppard, I assure you, does not understand her."

"Neither do you, Helen; her governess is the proper person to mind her, and to be troubled with her; not you, poor child."

Ethel Handon offended her father in every way. She was volatile and self-willed, ungraceful in her movements, and annoyed his sense of delicacy by her manner, which was flippant and pert. He was too over-bearing for her nature, and she grew beyond bounds under mismanagement; there was so much generosity in her composition that she would have obeyed her gentle step-mother, whereas she resisted her father, and spared no opportunity of creating the greatest possible amount of trouble for Miss Sheppard, who fretted at the lack of improvement in her pupil, chafed at her awkward ways, scolded her incessantly, and complained to her father so frequently, as to make him feel his daughter was the bane of his existence. He was heartily ashamed

of her, and would have suppressed her if he could.

The second wife, Helen, left a bright cheerful home where a number of brothers and sisters were proud of her, and fond almost to idolatry, and their sorrow and disappointment were great upon finding that they had to give her up entirely when she married Colonel Handon. She had never once visited them since she left, nor had one of her relatives been invited to see her. Colonel Handon wished for none but herself, and would have prohibited correspondence if he could ; he wanted Helen to be his and his only. The birth of her little daughter proved an occasion for many letters, for her sisters and friends wanted her baby to be called "Annie Louisa," after her dear somebody, but she briefly told them it was to be christened Dora; not a word of invitation for any of them. Helen knew her husband did not wish for her mother, or she would have asked for her to come ; but she accepted her lot, and tried to withdraw her affections, and centre them on her husband and child.

Helen's father was a man of energy, and a

large family had to be provided for; his expenses in England must increase, so he determined to emigrate, and he with his family were amongst the earliest settlers in Queensland.

Little Dora was only seven weeks old when Colonel Handon took Helen to bid farewell to her old home. No doubt it was a heavy trial to all parties, but more so to Helen. The busy father and mother, brothers and sisters, knew she had made a wealthy marriage, and they felt thankful to leave one child well provided for; and there was so much to do, and to arrange, that the parting was got over with far less excitement and grief than Helen expected. Now and then she felt lonely, knowing the probability that she should meet them no more on this side the grave; but she had her baby, and her husband was kind, though very solemn, to live with always. Then she had Ethel, though by a great mistake of her husband's, she was not allowed to interfere with her, else her youth would have been gladdened by affection; for Ethel had a glowing heart, ready to respond to warm love, and to be solaced as well as her step-mother. Helen had been in the habit of

teaching a younger sister, and had a fund of loving patience, but she was told it would not be consistent with the wife of Colonel Handon to act the part of governess, and her husband declared he always intended that her step-daughter should be no annoyance to her. So, harsh, well-meaning, Miss Sheppard crushed the good out of poor Ethel, who became more disagreeable to her father every day. Nurse declared it was not safe to allow Miss Ethel in the nursery, for she "banged her ball or shuttlecock so very hard she might break her little sister's head;" and the vociferous tones in which she made known her wants or fancies, having once or twice disturbed the mid-day slumbers of little Dora, estrangement crept in there, the nursery was tabooed, and a formal complaint lodged with Colonel Handon, followed by a command that his daughter from henceforth must not enter on any terms the precincts of the nurse's territories, and a garret was prepared for a play-room for Ethel to disport herself in, alone, during the periods allotted to recreation.

Helen knew she could soon tame her, and even

induce her to speak gently, walk properly, and leave off tearing her dresses—failings for which she was for ever *en penitence* with her governess. Now and then she ventured on a remonstrance, and Ethel would embrace her with her strong arms so warmly as to lift her off the ground.

“You dear, little, pretty, weak thing, don’t get your sweet self into hot water on my account; Dora will be all you require, a tiny, soft-worded thing. Old nurse will be telling tales to the General if you come near me, so sweet thing, never mind me! I love you too much to get *you* into a row!”

“Dear Ethel, that is not likely; you mistake your father, he wishes you to be happy.”

“Not he, not a bit; but I shall spite him yet, and that crusty old Sheppard too, horrid old dragon!”

“I cannot hear such remarks, dear Ethel.”

“Well, go down, darling, you will only get yourself into trouble; go to your baby, and leave me to my sulks, or to know that I may knock myself into good temper if I like without hurting you.”

"Poor lonely girl! You ought to go out on such a lovely day as this."

"Of course I ought, but old Sheppard denies me that, and I believe papa thinks I shall grow *less robust* by being kept in."

"Ethel, you must have a pony."

"If you can get me that, I'll be as soft as a mole and as tender as a chicken!" Her eyes shot forth light as she spoke, those blue-grey eyes, which her father said had no expression!

"I will promise you a pony, dear Ethel," and such an embrace she received, and the girl danced round and round the garret with her delight.

Helen kept her word, too, and a pony was sought and found, and in order that there might be no delay she provided a habit, hat, and whip, which came home as soon as possible; and so great was Ethel's joy, that she submitted to be equipped with care and patience. She was large and wonderfully formed for a girl of fourteen, and her riding-dress became her as nothing had done before. Her abundant fair hair was tightly braided, and the rich plaits showed to advantage beneath her pretty

hat, which shaded a face radiant with new delight.

Colonel Handon could scarcely believe in the transformation. Ethel walked to the door with ease and deliberation, was mounted, and showed no fear, and in spite of her *embonpoint*, looked well and even graceful. There was no difficulty in teaching her to ride, she knew how to hold herself and her reins by intuition; the riding-master praised her, and her father, for the first time, felt not ashamed of owning her; he was half inclined to be proud of his daughter before the ride was over.

Helen met her after it, and went with her to undress after her first ride, a girl's great event.

"Are you tired, Ethel?"

"Not a bit." She flung her hat on the bed and her arms round Helen, and burst into tears.

"You *are* tired, Ethel."

"No, indeed, but I am happy, it is so nice. I told you if you got me the pony you should see a change, and you shall. Oh, I thought my pony would be only a little one, and it is

much larger and taller than 'Lady Constance Burke's!' Oh Helen! we met her to-day, and hers is so small, and my whip is so much prettier than hers, and my habit is cloth, quite like a grown-up person's, and hers is only linsey. I cannot tell you what I felt."

"I am so glad you like it, Ethel."

"If you were my own mother you could not have done more," and she sobbed violently.

"But papa will think these tears but curious thanks, dear Ethel."

"He will not know; you know what it is to be happy for the first time, and not to find everyone cold and ashamed of one; he could not understand. I shall dream of Firefly. I never saw so beautiful a creature. I hope papa will take me out soon again."

Ethel's heart had something now which soothed it; her impetuosity was curbed, and her impatience. She toyed with her whip and hat in her own room, and measured her habit; more than once she proposed to visit the stables, and take food to Firefly from the luncheon table; but Helen dissuaded her quite easily. Ethel was becoming tractable, and one

day, having heard her father say to his wife, "Ethel will be a capital horsewoman," she approached Helen gently, with that strange light in her eyes, and said,—

"I will go and write out all those verbs at once;" for in the morning there had been a wrangle in the schoolroom, and Helen had for once thought it well to interfere. Miss Sheppard had imposed too severe a task; but Ethel had gratitude, and in the fulness of it thought nothing too hard to prove how much she thanked her step-mother, and Helen, too, grew less lonely in her love.

CHAPTER VI.

MARRIAGE.

ETHEL grew very handsome, but was a strange, peculiar girl. Colonel Handon might have made her a safe friend, however ; but he did not, though he acknowledged her improvement.

Little Dora was a pretty chattering little girl when Ethel was at last emancipated from the trammels of the schoolroom, and Miss Sheppard had her *congé*. Next Ethel was presented, and some little time devoted to fashionable life. One day little Dora was prettily dressed in white silk, with a wreath of white rosebuds and a fanciful veil attached to her head, and she officiated as bridesmaid to her half-sister, who was married to Captain George Farnham, of the —th regiment, as bold a rider as he was a

brave soldier. He had served in India and at the Cape, in China and at home, was of good family, and had a fair amount of fortune ; but the match did not please Colonel Handon, who however told Helen that as Ethel had done nothing but disappoint him ever since her birth, he could not be surprised at her wishing to marry one he did not care for. Poor Ethel's first fault, that of being a girl instead of a boy, had never been forgiven ; whereby her father lost his first wife's property.

Ethel became Mrs. George Farnham, and rode to her heart's content, and had no lack of companions in her equestrian tastes ; three or four more ladies of the regiment rode also, and some of the officers with them, who were noted for high-priced and well-bred horses.

The following hunting season saw Ethel in her element, and Helen could not but rejoice at her letters, which told of perfect happiness ; she hoped time would steady her abundant spirits, and bring her to be a fine and reasonable character. The first year of married life, however, seemed to promise a contrary effect. Captain Farnham's father kept the Bourne

hounds, and after two months of excellent hunting, Helen had read in the papers the exploits of Mrs. George Farnham, who outdid all others in the field, and wore a scarlet habit; she began to dread, but as Colonel Handon seemed to be neither surprised nor displeased, she forbore to make remarks.

At Christmas Ethel paid a short visit to her old home, and it was remarked that she had become a singularly handsome woman, her dress in perfect taste; and her rich hair, confided to the care of a French maid, showed signs of an experienced hand. Her manner was so much softened as to astonish Colonel Handon. She told Helen,—

“You are the cause of any change for the better in me; thank yourself only for it, that papa did not cast me off. You and that pony saved me. I could let off the surplus steam without going into a rage. George seems quite satisfied with me, and wildly as I seem to ride, he never fears for me in any way. He says he can trust me implicitly; it is all very nice.”

That light was in her eyes again, and Helen

could see her love for George would keep her straight ; she kissed her tenderly, and said to herself, "George is right."

Ethel could not bear too tight a curb, George gave her her head altogether, but he knew she was sure.

That short visit produced much peace, for her father was pleased with her, and saw more in her husband to like ; indeed, he found that he had more in him than he had at first given him credit for, and Helen felt a sort of peaceful conviction too, that George and Ethel Farnham were made for each other. After they left, Dora claimed her sole attention, and accounts from Queensland being satisfactory, she gave herself up to enjoyment at last, for time had allowed her to grow quiet and grave herself, and so to suit her husband by becoming inured to his solemn ways, and she assured herself she had no cause to complain. Her daughter was the very opposite to Ethel in every way, in disposition, complexion, and mind, and the darling and almost idol of her father ; but Dora never took advantage of his disposition to indulge her, and she could not be spoiled ;

she was also singularly free from the faults which beset an only child, and was judiciously treated by Helen, and evils prevented which might have grown, so that months fast lapsed into years, and mother and child passed them full of happiness.

CHAPTER VII.

MAJOR TALBOT.

MEANWHILE Colonel Handon began to be a great deal from home more than in the early years of Dora's life, and Helen did not complain, for she had a companion, and did not wish to be a fetter on his liberty. The master of the household would sometimes return from an absence with a set of guests who were all welcome to his wife except one, and he unfortunately proclaimed himself as her husband's greatest ally. This was Major Talbot.

Helen could never explain to herself why she disliked him so deeply, but she did. His presence galled her, and his influence began to extend, and to be felt even after his departure. It seemed hard to Helen to own this in his absence, but so it was. Colonel Handon,

formerly energetic and active, and easily pleased in his own quiet way, had become latterly so completely under the dominion of Major Talbot, that he seemed to rule the premises. The wiles of Satan are not more varying than his were. Helen saw through his deceitful management of her husband, and lamented it, but what availed ? If any wish of hers were spoken, he had one which ran counter to it, and shortly she was told "not to be rebellious" by her husband, and was treated to a short discourse upon spiritual graces from Major Talbot ; for under the cloak of religion he advanced with so much subtle influence in the good graces of Colonel Handon, as to undermine her domestic happiness. A miserable canting form of expression prevailed before Helen, and she could not help feeling surprised at her husband's want of penetration, as he was so bewitched by his ardent, watchful, and wakeful friend, Major Talbot. What was it to Helen if large sums were lost or made away with ? She had a settlement ; this was put before her in plain terms by the Major himself, when she put in a timid word of expostulation

one morning, an occasion she took hold of to try to break his undue power over her husband.

"It is discouraging to see one's best efforts set aside as so much vain babbling," said Major Talbot; "and motives affixed to one's intentions which were not so destined," and he gave a pious turn of the eyes.

"You mistake me, Major Talbot. I have put no misconstruction upon your words or actions," said Mrs. Handon. But the bolt fell; he was her bitter enemy for evermore, and knew that she saw through the shallow veil of his religion clearly.

For years had Major Talbot lived upon his wits; more than once he had grasped gold, but let it slip through his fingers. He was "penny wise and pound foolish" to a degree that rendered him ridiculous to a beholder, and at this present time Helen Handon knew that he was making use of the power acquired over the colonel to render him "pound foolish" only too fast. So the old man turned upon her, and reminded her, with truth as well as politeness, that four thousand pounds were settled upon herself. Impertinent! she thought; how

does he know this ? and dare to tell me. How has he so completely ascertained the sum, and my husband's affairs in general, and even to assure her of her child's fortune being ensured to her ? Poor Ethel had taken away but a scanty marriage portion ; but Helen supposed more would be hers in time, and she did not like the control which Major Talbot exercised. Colonel Handon had told her of a goodly sum invested in the funds, and Helen hoped Mrs. Farnham was to get some of it. It was "the little rift within the lute, which by-and-by would make the music mute," this daily interference, this specious visitor, who was willing to put up with any personal inconvenience ; who thought only of the well-being of his esteemed host ; who was always in sight just when Colonel Handon felt disposed to walk ; and Helen saw him go out with her husband and return only in time to dress for dinner ; and even from that she was advised to retire earlier than her former habits made customary, and go to her little Dora, who no longer made her appearance at dessert, the father having become convinced that it was not good for her

Dora was little at eleven, little still at fifteen ; but we must not anticipate. So Dora, at eleven, saw a change come over the household, her mother grow thoughtful, and her father less kind and indulgent, and more often absent.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLOONEDEN.

THOMAS MUSGRAVE TALBOT came into the world "with a silver spoon in his mouth," if ever mortal man did. Every advantageous circumstance surrounded his infant days ; and during boyhood no contradiction was suffered to restrict his pleasures or to embitter his comforts ; father, mother, tutor, and servants denied him nothing, and he soon acquired the knowledge of his importance in their eyes, and behaved accordingly. He was not without talents ; nature had been bountiful ; but what boy would work in a case like his, where friends outvied each other in indulgences. His life with his tutor was one continual holiday ; the said tutor had no chance, he would have lost his well-paid situation if every request were

not granted. Once or twice in the week a short lesson was managed, but various amusements distracted the boy's attention. Very soon these palled upon him; in a natural course of things, no boy enjoys play when "all play, and no work," are within his reach. At too early an age he had tried pleasures which ought to have been kept back till school days were over, and he had followed his own devices ever since he could walk; and everyone tendered their services to follow out all his caprices. A good tutor or a school would have saved him; but such a mother as Mrs. Talbot dismissed the thought with indignant reproaches upon the daring person who uttered such a suggestion. She was surprised and distressed to see lines of care upon his face at an early age; his brow even contracted into actual wrinkles, and his eyes had no longer the clear, healthy, confiding look of boyhood; no loving glance shot from them such as a boy should give his mother. She had enough discernment to detect this, but not enough wisdom to act strongly in time, and stop the source of future sorrow. Mr. Tempest she could see taught him nothing,

but Musgrave was too fond of idleness not to rebel now at a change; even his father said, "It was too late now to trouble himself about study; he could do nothing at his age but enjoy himself."

Economy is a good thing in itself, and in all cases; but there is nothing which absolutely pays better than economy of enjoyment. The most charming view, the most pleasurable excitement, wearies, when too oft repeated, and at last pleasure ceases and disgust begins.

Mr. Tempest tendered his resignation when he found the moment had arrived that his pupil threatened to disgrace him by conduct unworthy himself, his name, or friends, and his determination was hastened likewise by an expressed goodwill on the part of Musgrave Talbot to kick the said Mr. Tempest off the premises. Before he left he requested a private interview with Mrs. Talbot, and divulged secrets which saddened her heart, and showed how her son had given himself up to the worst vices, had been guilty of dishonest conduct, and gross neglect of all that was due to a gentleman. His tastes were low and grovelling; neverthe-

less Mr. Tempest, fearful of blame, set before her so earnestly the pain this would give his father, and pleaded so warmly that she would spare him the knowledge, that Mrs. Talbot consented to bear the weight of her son's iniquity in secret, and Mr. Tempest left her alone. "Alone," she felt, "alone for evermore." Musgrave must be taken from the neighbourhood, so why distress her husband after all? She argued herself into the belief that it was well to be even alone in her knowledge. This was, of course, against the dictates of conscience; no argument is needful to let truth prevail; our own sense portrays the right in most cases. Even instinct, which would supply conscientiousness to a mother, told her that to lop off the first shoots of evil might save the branch; but she stilled the voice, and her son, dreading lest Mr. Tempest should inform his father of his delinquencies, sought her presence, and without a blush upon his cheek, said,—

"I suppose Tempest has been telling lies about me?"

"I shall be glad if you can show me they are lies; your father would grieve deeply at

there being truth in what I have heard, Musgrave."

"All right ; I see he has not been told, and you will not peach, I know."

"We must leave here, Musgrave, and not see Castle Talbot for some years."

"Oh ! the sooner the better ; I am horridly sick of it, and hate Ireland. Let us go at once."

"Your father must be told some reason for our haste, Musgrave."

"Tell him what you like. But it would never do to leave him behind, somebody would give him the whole story."

"Tell me your version of it, Musgrave."

"My version is that all the neighbours are a pack of lying, buzzing, prying rascals."

"I see you are in the wrong, and deeply, too."

"Well, it is no use for you to whine, but try to get me out of this mess."

Mrs. Talbot knew her son had promised to marry the daughter of a small farmer and tenant, and the father and brothers of Rosie Burke might not let him off easily if they

learnt particulars before the departure of the young heir to Castle Talbot. Idleness had caused him to spend his days at Clooneden ; and Rosie, older than himself, and artful as well as good-looking, had so conducted herself as to obtain a promise from him to make her his wife. The amusement of loitering and chattering with Rosie had begun, like everything else, to tire with over-use, and she spoke of her engagement to Mr. Tempest, and of her intention shortly to make it public ; so Musgrave was afraid of seeming neglectful, lest it should thereby reach his father's ears. He tried to talk her over to keep silence, and repeated his promises ; but Rosie could see that his love was over, there was no depth in him ; she grew impatient about his rash promises, and wanted a written and binding promise before she would be silent ; her pretty lips spoke in earnest words, but he told her she was a fool, and he insisted on her waiting yet a few days. Nor was this his only reason for wishing to leave Castle Talbot, but it was one which bore upon his mother ; and she arranged to get the agent to ignore the case of Rosie in his

letters to Mr. Talbot, and the parents and son set off for Germany in great haste. Mrs. Talbot managed to overcome all objections and scruples, and in the autumn of the same year she watched with some interest her son's face as he read that fever had broken out in the neighbourhood of Castle Talbot, and amongst those to whom it proved fatal were the names of Terence, Rosie, and Bridget Burke. No sign of sorrow or pleasure altered his face ; he had forgotten his love, and cared not whether she lived or died. Mrs. Talbot acknowledged relief ; but the son had no feeling, and so the spoiled youth grew into the selfish, hardened man. Life on the continent pleased, until, like all else, it led to satiety.

A polished exterior, at all events, he owed to his life abroad, for his father made him mix with good society, but his heart was rugged and cold. Father and mother died within a few months of each other, and Musgrave, at five-and-twenty, found himself master of his fortunes, but did not return to Ireland.

Some years passed away in foreign towns, which told upon both his appearance and his

pocket. Dissipation and a desultory unsystematic course of life told also on his manners, which were alternately evasive, deficient, or *bland* as best suited the moment. With perfect strangers he could seem the most polite of men, and men and women were taken in by his oily, *suave* words, and a specious, mild flattery, peculiar to some humours ; he could make up sentences of sweet words, and look at the time pleasing and amiable ; but once find him out, and illusion vanished, his temper soon broke forth ; he had no balance of principle, had never taken pride in the enlargement of his mind ; his knowledge of books was superficial, and his head and heart narrow and little, and *choked* with weeds. .

As years still passed on his hair became thin, his whiskers shabby and scanty ; phrenologists shook their heads over his “bumps,” and seemed to see why this man had no regard for truth, though an over-weening self-esteem and love of approbation would predominate for a while, till a counter-irritant induced him to act in a foolish, undecided way. He was hard to live with ; if he ordered dinner, punctuality

was strictly enjoined, and his guests were invited to arrive at a particular minute; but just as they came, and the first course was served, a letter must be written, and that must contain three sides of directions on some important subject, followed by a long apology, and involved in such uncertainty, that the recipient knew not how to act, and was finally relieved by a postscript begging him to "do nothing till he heard again." All his letters were equally lucid.

He had married at thirty, and driven his poor wife to rest quickly, persecuted out of her life in three years! But two sons remained to remind him of her existence, and these were amply provided for by her friends, who had managed to take charge of them and keep the poor boys at school.

Agent, lawyer, sons, friends, and acquaintances all knew too well the value of Major Talbot's letters to trouble themselves to read them, till they had a convenient season. No breakfast or dinner was ever interrupted by them. "That will keep," was everyone's greeting to his long epistles, for though he

filled sheets of paper, he always failed to express what he meant to say, and if a really important fact must be announced, he had a trick of omitting names, and forgetting dates, which rendered it doubtful after all. In nine cases out of ten it may have been affected carelessness; he could not decide, and left a loophole on all occasions for alteration.

His elder son, an accomplished linguist, had a good appointment in the civil service in India, where his wonderful facility in the tongue of Hindustan served him well. The second, having gone with his regiment to the Mauritius, married there, sold out after a few years, and settled there.

In his later years, Major Talbot occasionally visited his property in Ireland, having accepted a majority in the militia of his county, and on one occasion appeared at barracks, and took up his quarters at the annual training; but his military duties, like all others, sat lightly upon him.

Castle Talbot, and the adjacent village Clooneden, had not improved under him. Once he speculated, and filled the place with miners,

disregarding the advice of an eminent geologist ; determined to find mines of tin, he set to work with spirit, and then "urgent business" called him again abroad, and the poor men disputed and could not get redress. A hundred or more grew quarrelsome, and the magistrates voted the work a nuisance, payment was delayed, and at length the mining given up.

His next mania was to import bricks from England, and make a new frontage to all the village. It was an expensive fancy, but was to reform the place by giving it an English aspect. On his next visit to Clooneden, seven years after, he expressed surprise, however, at finding his bricks all whitewashed.

A quarry was then opened, but the expense of transit overcame the profit ; the hill-side was left bare and unsightly ; a vein of sand attracted a wise head, and pottery works were within calculation, and machinery might have paid well, but there wanted a master-mind and steady head over the whole estate ; the result may be guessed. Every year the income diminished, the village grew from bad to worse,

respectable people fled from it, stragglers and beggars took possession there, till it became a hot-bed of vice and wretchedness.

The mansion became dilapidated, the roof was never attended to, nor broken windows mended; the care-taker, like the agent, grew apathetic, the gardener lazy, and a labourer now and then put in a few days' work as equivalent to long arrears of rent.

No vestige of pleasure-ground or flower-garden remained, and fruit-trees grew degenerate, and every walk was choked with weeds. By-and-by began difficulties about wages; money was needed for repairs—needed undoubtedly, but none was forthcoming. Labourers would come no more when payment was deferred from week to month. Gardeners cared not for the uncertain market of Ninescroft; and finally, a fit of economy led the steward to slate over the peach-house and vinery after a destructive hailstorm, slates being there cheaper than glass. The same number of slates applied to the roof of Castle Talbot would have been of service; but why preserve the upper rooms from wet, when even the lower ones were

never used ? These were the agreeable arguments in favour of still further diminution in property ; fine Brussels and Turkey carpets, by a singular metamorphosis became, in lapse of time, mere Kidderminster ; and handsome mahogany and rosewood furniture turned into common deal ; damask curtains were said to be liable to moths, and faded chintz, supposed to wear better, supplied their place. In process of time the house assumed so much of the Castle Rackrent species, that its owner said he could not go there, so he took a house in Dublin, and one at Warringdale ; he was never contented with one residence only.

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CHAPTER IX.

REGRETS.

MORE and more did Mrs. Handon find cause to regret the intimacy which grew closer between her husband and his friend; they became inseparable. First Colonel Handon's advice was asked about matters in Ireland, and a visit was planned which was to extricate some affairs, Major Talbot regretting that his home was in too deplorable a condition to entertain a lady, and he asked, in his honied tones, if he could ever dare to claim her forgiveness, after bearing away her lord, &c.

Colonel Handon had been in Ireland many years before, and was not displeased with the idea of a trip, and as they were to remain but one fortnight, Helen could not plead displeasure, or show dislike, when Major Talbot sued

so humbly for pardon. She tried, also, not to be timid, and chid herself for being unreasonable.

It was fine autumn weather, too, and she led little Dora to the cornfields, and stood with her to watch the women and children gleaning. Those golden ears made them look so picturesque, and Dora found blue cornflowers, and bright scarlet poppies, and corncockles in the hedges, blue geranium or crane's-bill, and was so happy, that her mother gave her time for enjoyment, and talked with the gleaners, showing kindly interest in their stories of how much Peggy had gathered, and how little, Mary brought home; though all added together seemed a large quantity, and a little help is welcome to poor people.

In spite of herself, and her walks with Dora, or long drives into the country, a dread of the future could not be shaken off. Dora, young as she was, felt something of it too. She was small in stature, but womanly in her tastes and affections.

The first absence from home of Colonel Handon was followed by many. He grew

short in his answers, and stingy in money matters. A liberal table had hitherto been kept, and numerous servants ; yet he suddenly recollected that Helen had not been accustomed in early life to luxuries ; her carriage was sold, and one by one every comfort was curtailed, till she began to feel hurt and vexed at his penuriousness.

Dora, too, had a German governess, and a schoolroom maid, to attend her. Both were dismissed in a summary manner, and her mother was told that he allowed her to follow the bent of her inclination, and she was henceforth to be the sole instructress of her child.

Now Helen had, years ago, asked for more liberty to teach Ethel, whose days were gall and wormwood under Miss Sheppard, and her stepmother wished to intervene and ward off attacks of crossness and over-discipline, which accorded ill with her temperament, and caused her to tear up and down her garret playroom, like a panther in a cage, when she ought to have been running in the fresh air. The garret " did not take off her superfluous steam, nor the knowledge that ' old Sheppard ' kept her

in out of spite," improve her temper. Still Ethel had come wonderfully well out of her trials, and her stepmother had cause to be thankful that she had procured "that dear personal friend Firefly" withal; she said this in one of her letters, long after she was married.

Dora was a different creature, and Mrs. Handon had been pleased with the cheerful, happy, German girl, and her steady routine of education; however, the fair stranger departed, and the lessons continued. Marie Vertmann soon obtained a new situation, and wrote to Dora from Dusseldorf. She was fond of her late pupil, and keenly alive to Mrs. Handon's goodness of heart. She was again in an English family, and spoke of the probable visit to Italy which they intended to make before settling in England again.

Meanwhile, a new feature displayed itself; coldness was evident amongst Mrs. Handon's acquaintance, for which she could in nowise account; but poison was skilfully instilled into their minds by Major Talbot, and began next to act upon her husband.

Miserable days succeeded, misconstructions.

were put upon all her actions, and there was not one to defend her cause. Actual cause there was none; there were only innuendos and smothered suggestions which made people say and think "there must be something." There was nothing except the determination on the part of Major Talbot to appropriate part of the fortune of Colonel Handon—a base desire, to be carried out, as he saw occasion. He clutched every chance of making estrangement in the family of his victim until he had him at last safely in his toils.

Helen began to find her home so changed and unhappy that her health failed, and she desired to leave it for a little change, but could not by reason of the lowness of her purse; so she made no complaint, but daily walked out with Dora, since her carriage was sold, and exercise was recommended for both mother and daughter by the vigilant Major Talbot, whose wishes found words in the mouth of Colonel Handon. Summer was succeeded by winter, the comfort of home was gone since the family adviser had taken up his abode there.

"I can rest nowhere else," he said, smiling;

"my disease has become chronic, and your society is necessary to preserve vitality." Then he bowed across the table to Helen, but his words and accent went to prove to Colonel Handon that his unfortunate friend had his sympathy, and how he felt deeply for a man whose wife was uncongenial with his tastes. He had never found out that his wife did not suit him, but it became evident to everybody now; he felt he must have been very blind since he could now see what everyone else knew; in fact people began to shun his house, whither formerly they had resorted with pleasure, as voluntary morning guests as well as on invitation. He then used strange language to his child, talking to her about "snares," and "hypocrisy," and a great deal about "prayerful solicitude;" but Dora mistrusted him since his friend was at his elbow, and her innocent heart grieved for her mother. At last, it came to his going away without even the ceremony of taking leave, and Dora sought for her with a troubled face.

"Mamma, I am sure he is gone for a long time."

"Dear child, I think not; he has no more luggage than he always takes. Did he tell you anything?"

"No, mother, but I know his look when Major Talbot is making him do things."

The servants could only say that he always took a good supply of clothing lately, as he said it was a safe precaution, one could never tell what might happen; but everyone in the house had a peculiar sensation of forlorn, helpless sorrow, which they could not cast off. Helen tried to drive it away by saying,—

"Perhaps we may get a letter to-morrow." But she said it without hope, and sorrowed silently, with a heart bleeding inwardly over happy days departed. "If I only knew where he is," she groaned, night after night; she could not sleep for her anguish, and her cheek grew pale and thin.

He was an old man now, and wanted careful home comforts from which he was expelled; he had been her tender husband, and she could not cast him off, and had given him all her heart since her relatives were so far away as Queensland, and hardly shared her love. But

he was gone, and something told her never to return. Letters never came, but servants' wages did become due, and butcher's bills, and baker's too; tradespeople could not believe Mrs. Handon had no money. She was in a sore strait, and at last took to her bed, worn out and sick with anxiety.

Strange to say they heard of him first from Fraulein Vertmann, who had seen him at Boulogne, and noticed how he looked ill and aged; like a soldier, she said, after a hard fight.

"Write, Dora, and ask for more particulars; and, above all, if she saw Major Talbot."

"I will, mamma, but will they remain at Boulogne? who knows where he may make papa go?" Anything is better than suspense and uncertainty, so she wrote. It is terrible to think of Dora's agony of mind as she wrote about her father.

Marie Vertmann, however, had left her situation, for Sir Justin Adams thought her too soft and gentle for his girls; he had a quick temper, and Lady Adams was a lethargic, large-bodied, but small-souled woman, and the girls partook of their mother's heavy, sleepy ways and mind;

so instead of bringing Marie to England, Sir Justin paid her a handsome sum in compensation, and sent her to Paris with a letter to the mistress of a *pension*, in which she could board, and look out for another home.

Dora's letter was sent after her to Paris, but Marie knew nothing more ; she wrote however to Sir Justin Adams, begging him to make inquiries at Boulogne for Colonel Handon.

And whilst he was employed in that manner the body of an aged gentleman, fully dressed, was found near the *jetée* ; he had handsome features, and a noble form, but there was no one to identify him ; he seemed to have no kindred or friends. Sir Justin Adams himself went and brought Marie, and she swore that she believed the dead body to be that of Colonel Handon. A long *procès verbal* followed ; none could doubt her statement, since she had known the deceased well. But how came he there ? was it an accident, or had ill-blood or a duel been the cause ? He had left his apartments, having ordered dinner that day in his own room, and gone out for a short promenade, intending to return at a certain hour.

Marie showed Dora's letter to Sir Justin, and tried to find a trace of Major Talbot, but could not. No money was found in his pockets, his small travelling desk, or in his trunks ; so the case assumed a new phase, and robbery suggested itself to Sir Justin Adams, and the robber had escaped ; yet what proof ? Could it be robbery, insanity, or involuntary accidental push, and by whom ? What hand, if not voluntary, caused this death by drowning ? Had a despairing mind led to it, or had the robber given an impetus ? Question followed question, but none could answer them. Fraulein Vertmann told of the position of the gentleman, and gave his address in England. No one believed he was in pecuniary distress, for Colonel Handon had appeared to be a wealthy man.

The *vivâ voce* trial was over, Sir Justin Adams was thanked by the authorities for the assistance he had yielded, a few written informations were taken, and the friends were apprised of the unfortunate occurrence.

CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE YOKE.

WHILST the body lies yet unburied, and the sad news is conveyed to his wife and Dora of his death, and the end of the miserable doubts which pervaded their lives is confirmed, truth may be told, but truth which was not found out. Colonel Handon died by poison, which was skilfully administered by his friend, Major Talbot; but there was no inquiry, and no evidence of this; the French authorities wisely enough thought drowning sufficient to kill a man; but poison had nevertheless been taken so often and so skilfully that he could not have lived much longer. In his weak state a stumble or false step precipitated him into the sea at Boulogne. No bottle, no lotion, no suspicious sediment in wineglass or tumbler conveyed this

truth ; the owner of his apartments told how he came alone to them the day before ; he had been out into the country before that, he said ; his murder was sure ; it would have been as fatally achieved without the fall, for the death drink had been swallowed, and must have acted, though possibly a few hours later. Major Talbot had left him to die ; he had given his last dose in a tumbler of wine and water, and having removed all vestiges which could have aroused suspicion, sailed to England, leaving him alone, to die. He was prepared when he should hear of Colonel Handon's death to prove his long anxieties, his cares and domestic estrangement and tribulations, and resolved also in his diabolical depth of wickedness to throw suspicion upon Fraulein Vertmann, in arguing that she had spitefully administered a draught, in revenge for his having dismissed her from the post of governess to his daughter, with still further enormities which he designed to bring forward to prove that her conduct was a tissue of guilt during the time she taught Miss Handon. This was to be a last resource only, in the event of any such *desagré-*

ment as post-mortem inquiry, or any evidence of his work being brought to light.

What words, or what pen can pourtray the relief it was to his guilty mind, when the news reached him at Folkestone that his friend was drowned ! He felt inclined to cry out " Providential ! " Habit had rendered his selfishness so complete, that he almost dared to thank Heaven when his plans succeeded, and his plot was yet hidden.

Something must be done. What so natural, or so likely to divert suspicion as for him to escort the widowed wife and daughter to Boulogne, was his first thought ?

" Fool ! I forget myself," was the next ; " there is no suspicion." He warmed under this recollection, and hastened to rouse Mrs. Handon to go with him to Boulogne. It was impossible ; her heart was heavy and her body was sick ; she could not rise from her bed to see him. Dora was counselled by her mother to go with Major Talbot, and take a last look at her father.

It was too late. Mademoiselle Vertmann was at the custom house, with Sir Justin

Adams, to receive her. Poor Dora, a deep wound lay hidden in her breast. She could not believe in Major Talbot, nor forgive him for causing her father to desert his home. And he, so plausible, was acting in such a manner as to prove that he had the warmest consideration for the family, and impressed Sir Justin with admiration for his thoughtful care to spare the feelings of the "comparatively youthful widow," and the "beautiful daughter of his lamented friend." His fluent French, and obsequious ways, made all beholders believe that he was a sincere mourner of the dead, and that he earnestly desired to do his best for the living.

Marie believed money was of no consequence to Dora, but she told all particulars about the *pension*, to which she was to return, having as yet spent only one night there, but she spoke of living cheaply in Paris, and taking lessons of some drawing-master.

Dora treasured the remembrance, and determined to get her mother removed thither in as short a space of time as she could. To leave home she knew would be inevitable, and she

likewise knew that Major Talbot would take the control of affairs, so they must even bear his yoke ; and her surmises were right. He undertook to arrange all business for Mrs. Handon, as executrix to her late husband, and to supply her from time to time with money ; but she and Dora arrived in Paris with so small a sum as to render the economical *pension* in which Marie lived, the most desirable abode, and Marie tried all she could to comfort them.

CHAPTER XI

GEORGE'S MONEY.

ETHEL FARNHAM had quieted down wonderfully two years after her marriage; she yet rode at intervals and promised herself great pleasure in teaching her children to manage their steeds. Time passed pleasantly with her, and as years went on duties increased; her eyes had the curious light when she spoke to George of her children, or when he lifted her from her horse after a canter more enjoyed than ordinary; their colour, too, was of a deeper blue than in her youth, and a look of trusting affection made them dear to those she loved.

Some called her a "masculine woman," but it was a libel; there was a fund of marvellous love in Ethel, as her husband found out.

She had four children when the regiment was ordered to New Zealand; they were, at the time, at Bleerness, and though their house was large and comfortable, it did not suit the health of Captain Farnham. Ethel hoped to have had a short time to visit home and see her sister Dora, whose letters were frequent and fond; but the children took measles, and her husband's marsh fever, as he called it, grew worse, and the leave expired, and no visit could be brought in. What a tender letter she wrote to Helen, and what love was in it for them all. "I think nothing of the voyage," she said; "but only long to get away now from Bleerness, for the children's kits are ready; we are to go to-morrow to the main land, away from this damp island of —, I forget which it is of two—I am no better at geography, you see, than formerly; but this dismal swamp is very unwholesome, and tries George dreadfully. We had some good balls, and George got on well with the naval officers who came in numbers; I tried to make him jealous about one or two, but did not succeed; he says a sailor husband would

never have suited me ; what does he mean ? I suppose he knows ; at any rate, he says I suit him, and calls me ‘such a good old woman,’ and I teaze him by threatening to cut off my hair and wear caps, in revenge for being always called ‘his old woman.’”

“She would have, indeed, to cut off her splendid hair, to get even the semblance of a cap over it,” said Helen ; and she stopped to shed tears of farewell over the other page, which was Ethel’s loving parting. Colonel Handon talked of running down to see them off ; but finally found “business of importance” which prevented him, for Major Talbot was on the alert, lest any flow of kindly feeling should form a pretext for any money arrangements. He kept his friend, therefore, aloof from Ethel and her family, who had been settled in New Zealand for three or four years when her father died.

Dora wrote a long letter to Ethel, and her mother a few sad short lines, and Galignani published an account of the melancholy catastrophe, and in a few months Major Farnham began to expect some accession to his wife’s

fortune, as it was rumoured she was to have something considerable on the demise of Colonel Handon.

Money is always welcome, and no one can deny the agreeable sensation which he experiences upon reading a lawyer's business-like intimation that a sum of so much has by will of such a person become ours. This pleasure never arrived, however, to the Farnhams. English mails came, but not the desired knowledge; and at length Ethel was told by her husband to write and make inquiries.

Helen and her daughter were in Paris, and had much difficulty in getting Major Talbot to send enough money to defray modest and quite necessary expenses; he always had some new pretext for delay in winding up affairs, or his law agent was absent; and when at last he did forward a meagre sum to Helen, there was no statement of accounts, and she was kept in complete ignorance of her husband's affairs, of how much he had left, where invested, or how much was gone to Ethel. If she inquired, he told her how thankful she ought to be that her departed husband had

left a friend in whom he could confide, and a rigmarole followed of all his services bestowed, and a list of her extreme obligations to Providence, but no reply to her questions.

At last Ethel's letter reached her, and in her vexation she sent it to plead its own cause, mentioning her surprise at having received it, and her belief that her husband left a large sum for Mrs. Farnham.

In a week it was returned to her, with a letter almost full of notes of admiration, wondering exceedingly at the "mercenary tones of a child's letter after the sudden removal from a world of woe of the nearest and best of parents." Mrs. Handon was recommended to remind her step-daughter of the "benefits she had received," and to ask how she could "expect the Supreme Disposer of human events to do more for her, for 'ingratitude' was a black crime," and a "grasping disposition" descanted upon, and patience, and duty both *filial* and *marital* enjoined.

Helen lost patience over this letter—it was too transparent; so she wrote a pretty clear statement of facts to Major Farnham, and

sent a copy of her letter to Major Talbot, and expressed her intention of returning at once to England to employ a friend in London to watch over the interests of her children.

So Major Talbot must be on his guard ; he did not doubt from Mrs. Handon's letter that her eyes were open to his frauds ; and only regretted that her health appeared to be so much restored, for he knew she would be as good as her word.

But Helen's constitution was broken down ; for many months daily shocks had undermined it, and she had become a confirmed invalid. Time, the great soother, had some effect, but her resolution to wrest her children's fate out of Major Talbot's hands had more. She knew no one in Paris to consult, but there was a Mr. Tailor in London who would see justice done, if not too late ; so she wrote to him, and husbanded her strength for an interview ; she felt her children's prosperity at last depended upon her life, and she prayed for a return of power to use it for their sake.

Marie Vertmann was not long in finding a family who wanted her services, and in Paris,

too ; and from her description of Mrs. and Miss Handon, her new patroness, Mrs. Broom, made their acquaintance, and her kindness and devoted friendship cheered their days.

Mrs. Broom called daily, and drove Helen to the Bois de Boulogne, and cheered her so much that her lonely feelings were somewhat dissipated, her strength no longer diminished, and Dora began to see a little tinge of colour in her mother's cheek.

One day Dora was out with Marie and her two pupils enjoying a little sight-seeing, Mrs. Broom promising to keep her mother out driving rather longer than usual, to allow Dora to see the Louvre better than she had yet had time to do ; and, as they were soon to leave Paris, it was pleasant for her to have the advantage of Marie's society. Mrs. Broom had grown fond, too, of Mrs. Handon. Extremes meet sometimes, and please ; Mrs. Broom was large, brusque, and florid, and formed a strong contrast to Helen.

"I expect very soon," she said, "to see my nephew ; he has been a great traveller, and writes that he will join me in Paris for awhile ;

I will bring him to see you and Dora, for he is a lion."

"Many thanks, but I fear I am scarcely equal to meeting a stranger," said Mrs. Handon.

"Well, we shall see how you are in a day or two; perhaps you may be stronger than you fancy. I will bring Bishop, at any rate, for he is worth seeing."

"And hearing, too, I dare say."

"He is, indeed; for he has a pleasant way of telling his adventures. Dora will like to see all his curious things, too; so keep well, and let me have her for one long day at least."

"My nephew," was the one topic for the next three days. Mrs. Handon and Dora both pictured him in their minds, and Dora fancied him quite young, not very much older, indeed, than his cousins Gertrude and Angeline Broom, who were tall girls of much talent, but never liked to be without a governess who would go with them to galleries and churches when their mother declared she was worn out and tired off her legs with standing about. Gertrude Broom was close upon seventeen,

and Angeline, though a year younger, taller, and older in figure. Mrs. Tait, a comely head nurse or confidante, went, whithersoever their fancy led, with the girls and Fraulein Vertmann ; so Mrs. Broom was quite at ease, and it comforted Dora to see her give so much time to her dear invalid, and she heard so much from the girls about Bishop, that her picture of him was a fine handsome young man, say, five-and-twenty, with agreeable manners and easy carriage, &c.

She was not prepared to receive the person who ultimately arrived with Mrs. Broom.

He wore a broad panama hat, and, in spite of the hot weather, a shawl of large dimensions was folded across his breast, after the manner of a Scotch plaid ; enormous spectacles hid a great deal of his face ; hair, whiskers and moustache of raven black ; for the rest, his eyes were piercing, but looked small through his glasses.

“ Bishop, this is Mrs. Handon,” said his aunt. He jerked off his panama, which hung by a long green ribbon to a button-hole, and bowed low.

"Bishop, this is Miss Handon." A similar bow was given to Dora, who timidly returned it, and walked across the room to sit beside her mother's sofa. A few words passed between the ladies.

"Bishop, how can you bear that great shawl this weather? Why do you persist in folding yourself up like an Egyptian mummy?"

"Ma tante, pardon! you know I never part with mon cachemire des Indes," he said.

"What folly! I thought it was a Scotch plaid!"

"Ma tante, pardon! c'est un vrai cachemire des Indes," he affirmed; and his face was grave and he looked as if he spoke truth.

"Take it off; you will frighten Mrs. Handon."

"Ma tante, c'est impossible; she will get used to it."

Mrs. Broom laughed, said something about her nephew being an oddity, but hoping he and Dora would speak, she occupied herself with Mrs. Handon. Dora gazed with surprise upon "my nephew" as he sat perfectly absorbed in thought; his thin hand found con-

stant employment in bringing the long black beard to a point—the panama dangled at the end of its ribbon, and the spectacles seemed as if for years they had covered those black eyes. Dora did not disturb his meditations ; she gave a guess at his age and set him down at forty-five ; she was wrong by twelve years, but travel and his peculiar mind made him look old.

“Come, Bishop, I see you are pining to get into the sun again,” said his aunt ; his eyes shot forth a beam of sunshine, and his moustache had one finishing twirl, and his mouth had a pleasant twinkle when he began to speak.

“Ma tante, do not hasten ; I am in paradise ; I love repose—I have found it—I pine for nothing.”

“I shall call for you this evening ; and, Dora, you will come too for our drive ?”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Handon, “but we must not fill your carriage now Mr. Broom is with you.”

“You don’t suppose I could drive in the Champs Elysées with that *Scotch hidalgo* ?” said she, looking very proud, all the same, of the odd individual who was tightening his

"veritable cachemire." "Besides, I suppose he will be locked up somewhere all the rest of the day; I can seldom get him at all," she said.

Bishop Broom took leave of the ladies with another bow deeper than before, and appeared to be quite unconscious that there was anything strange in his appearance.

"Really, Dora, I am so much disappointed in Mrs. Broom's nephew."

"So am I, mamma; he looks more like her husband than her son—I mean, nephew."

"Mrs. Broom is so fond of him, I dare say he is very clever; however, we shall not see much of him."

But he was in the carriage when it came later for them; and every day his panama and cachemire des Indes drove with them. He very seldom spoke, and Dora was glad of it. She had conceived a fierce dislike for his dark eyes and "horrid black beard," at which, even when out driving, his fingers were eternally busy.

Gertrude and Angeline told her he was worse than ever, and Marie Vertmann was frightened at him; before he came, his cousins

had heard so much of his travels and deep reading, that they were not inclined to make much of himself when he came in his South American hat; they meant him to be a gay Parisian lion-tamer, a perfect beau, an Adonis, ready to be their slave, morning or evening, and rated their mother on account of her fondness for her wild beast as they called him. Mrs. Broom loved him dearly, and let her daughters go their way; she devoted all her time to Bishop.

“Who is that Spanish-looking Dora, ma tante?”

“A very dear girl, Bishop; her father was Colonel Handon, and drowned at——”

He closed his eyes in his queer way and said, “I know, I know.”

“Her mother is dying, poor girl! Though they hope she is better, she will never live through next winter.”

Bishop said no more, but he screwed up his eyes, and looked as if he had already forgotten the subject of their conversation.

“I shall marry that Dora,” he said to himself.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW FRIEND.

EVERY day Mrs. Handon hoped for a letter from Major Talbot, and ventured to make plans as to what she would do on her return to England, but she could get no news from him or of his doings.

In September, the only sister of Colonel Handon arrived in Paris from Singapore; it was Bishop Broom who announced this, or she might otherwise have been ignorant, for the ladies had never met or held any intercourse by letters.

For twenty years Lord Meath had been removed from one government station to another, and at last died, and his wife and son were coming home. Lady Meath scarcely remembered her brother, and evinced no gratification

on finding that his wife and daughter were in Paris ; however, as friends of Mrs. Broom they were worth noticing. Bishop Broom had told her of their existence ; so she sent for Dora, who was taken in Mrs. Broom's carriage to see the sister of her father, and met with a cold reception from the most haughty, austere old lady it had ever been her lot to meet.

Charlie Meath, a sort of scapegrace youth, she thought delightful ; but his mother resented his wish to be at all intimate with his cousin, and Dora was too quiet and solemn a girl to please him altogether. She met him several times at the Brooms', and was always amused by his unavailing regrets about the past ; for he gave his views of life in the most diverting manner, showing all he meant to have done if his mother had only allowed him to come home years ago.

"I wanted to be an Englishman," he said, making a little face at Bishop Broom, who in truth did not look like one ; "but my mother deprived me of the pleasure by waiting till she was more than forty before she brought me into this world at all, by which mature age

she had lost all courage and thought it needful to bring me up in cotton wool and leading strings, till I was big enough to break them myself, and now I'm half a Chinaman and the other half a Malay."

"How so?" asked Gertrude, laughing.

"Why I can sit like a Japanese better than on a chair, lie on the ground and sleep in the middle of the day, with twenty-four pounders banging around me and never startle a nerve; I can——"

"You need not continue your string of accomplishments; I can believe the rest, Mr. Meath," said Gertrude.

"Because my ways are peculiar, you think I must be endowed with talents," he said, and again made Angeline know he was talking at Mr. Broom.

"Can you read and write, Mr. Meath?" she asked.

"A little," he replied, "in the language of Sumatra."

"Speak a few words in that tongue," said Dora.

"Hand me tablets, I will write the charac-

ters," said he, with affected weariness, sinking on to a low ottoman.

"Mr. Meath, I do not believe you know anything of either Chinese or Malay," said Gertrude.

"Request Mr. Broom to examine me," he replied, in a languid tone, and showed signs of going to sleep. "My hour of siesta is come," he said.

"But you are not going to sleep here, Mr. Chinaman, and on my new cushion, too. Come, Bishop, get your big hat, and you come too, Mr. Meath; let us show Dora the Luxemburg or something; she has seen but little in all these months."

"How kind you are," said Dora, in a low voice.

Charlie Meath sprang on to his feet. "Who is valiant? you, Mrs. Broom! you will, therefore, run your head into the mouth of the Lioness, and inform my too anxious and only maternal friend of my intended day with you, or she will fret over my defalcations, and a precious wiggling I shall get after it all."

There was no resisting this appeal, so Mrs.

Broom promised to comfort "his first and only mother," and Charlie yielded to his high spirits, and kept the whole party alive; the girls told themselves that dulness would have prevailed had Bishop alone been the gentleman of the party.

Mrs. Broom made peace with Lady Meath, and Charlie came yet again and again, and joined all the excursions. Mrs. Broom had no objection to his preference for her daughter Gertrude, which he made very evident, and Dora had a few days of peace, a brief season of happiness, but the thread was soon to be snapped.

One morning she was happily resting after a feast of pictures in the Versailles gallery, when Bishop Broom took a seat beside her, saying,—

"Miss Dora, you will soon be alone in Paris."

"Alone? how? Mr. Broom, is your aunt going away?"

"Miss Dora, what is my aunt to you?"

"A very kind friend, Mr. Broom."

"And you love her, ma tante, Miss Dora?"

"Certainly I do, very much, and would be sorry to lose her."

"For her own sake?"

"Yes, and for my mother's."

"It is your mother, Miss Dora, who will leave you."

"Oh no, I am going to England with her; she only waits for some letters."

Could Dora be so blind as not to see with what rapid strides death was advancing? He saw his touch had not awakened the chord he expected, and sat for some moments in silence; during this time his mind had decided to "risk it."

"Miss Dora," he said, in a tone of deep tenderness, "your mother is dying, you had better marry me."

Dora rose from the red velvet bench with a quick, wounded dignity sort of look, and was going away from him; he got up too, and followed her saying, as he walked beside her,—

"You think me too old for you, poor lonely girl; some day you will want protection. I will wait, and be ready to give it."

"Thank you," said Dora, in a calm, collected voice. She felt as if all around her were untrue, and that she walked and spoke in a dream.

Angeline Broom turned back for her, and took her hand to lead her to see something, and did not hear her question,—

"Is all this true?"

That was her last day of sight-seeing; nothing could lull her anxiety about her mother. Moreover, Mrs. Broom saw something had come upon Dora, but she did not know what; her face betokened calmness and resolution.

In the evening, when the doctor came, who had been attending her mother, he was surprised when Dora joined him in the ante-chamber as he was about to leave.

"Will you tell me, Dr. Foote, if my mother could with safety be got to England?"

"Is it of much importance to get her there?"

"Yes, very great, and she wishes it."

"She did not tell me so, but if family concerns depend upon it, she should go at once."

"Would not the change be beneficial?" asked Dora.

"I doubt it, my dear young lady."

"But if her mind were more at ease?"

"It would be well, certainly."

"Then I may not hope?"


"It is to hope against hope only."

Dora's little hand trembled as she opened the door for Dr. Foote; she had no more questions to ask. The kind doctor would gladly have taken the small hand and said soothing words, but in this case the manner of Dora prevented it. She said, "Good-night," with a self control becoming an elderly woman, who, after long experience and many trials, arrives at calmness in outward show.

She said that night,—

"I think, mamma, if we got to England, and asked Major Talbot to meet us at Newhaven, it would be a good plan."

Helen's eyes glistened; she knew that man had robbed herself and her children, and she yet longed to talk to him of their welfare; her dying words might avail in their behalf if she could only throw them upon his mercy; she



would like to try the last chance before she left the world.

“Would he refuse to see us, mamma?”

“He could not, Dora; let us leave to-morrow night, it will be quieter to travel by the last train, and I shall be spared some excitement. Write to Major Talbot to meet us.”

“Dora, have we enough money?” she asked soon.

“Yes, I think I can manage, mamma.”

“Then I will try to rest, my daughter.”

And she did sleep; repose had entered into her soul with the very thought of going to England; her nerves were calmer; she might yet do something with that man, and now her only effort was to help wondering why her long suffering patience had allowed her to stay in Paris. Why? oh, why did she not go before?

Helen had not seen Lady Meath, nor had Dora wished for an interview between the sisters-in-law; she dreaded lest Lady Meath's cold manner should quench the little comfort of her mother's life, who felt that Dora would have protection under her aunt's roof; but neither to Lady Meath nor to Mrs. Broom did

she go to say good-bye ; she wrote a note to each, and one to Marie Vertmann ; kept guard over her mother all day, and at midnight they left for Dieppe.

At Rouen a fit of weakness seized Mrs. Handon ; but she rallied, and at Dieppe there was time for a good rest before the steamer sailed, and Dora watched her sleeping with comparative comfort. She counted their money too, which was not difficult, for, after paying all demands at the *pension* and the fare for both to Newhaven, there was not much left.

The passage was rough and the passengers sea-sick and complaining, all but Helen, who never did grumble, and now felt a buoyancy of spirit that surprised both herself and Dora.

For two days they waited at Newhaven, but no letter came from Major Talbot. Dora began to dread the worst, and suspense was dreadful for her mother, whose weak state had so little resistance ; the weather was cold, too, and their room full of draughts. Mrs. Handon then pined to get to London, and inquire at the club and different haunts, if anything could be found of Major Talbot's

movements. So Dora wrote to "Blydon's Hotel" to ensure a room being warm and ready ; she dreaded a chill, or fireless grate, for her mother had become painfully sensitive to cold.

It was a foggy, damp day, when they put themselves into the railway carriage, and congratulated each other on having a *coupé* and no fellow-traveller.

"This is comfortable, Dora," said the mother.

"Very ; are you warm, mamma ?"

"Yes, my darling, thank you," and she settled herself as for a little doze.

Dora looked and watched the rain dash against the plate-glass, which was so covered with mist she could hardly see beyond it ; she rubbed a peep-hole now and then, and saw into the open country. Fitful gusts of wind at intervals threw sand or twigs against the glass, and it was a dreary cold aspect which presented itself. In an hour Helen roused herself, and spoke of many things, then seemed again overwhelmed with drowsiness, and Dora was glad that the journey was getting over so well ; but her face grew so ghastly, that Dora opened the window, and

faced the blinding storm, to see if a station were near; but they had stopped during her mother's slumber, and were now going at full speed. She raised her mother's head and tried to give her a little wine, and to revive her with smelling salts.

Again she opened the window, and this time hung forth her head and shrieked for aid,—

“Oh, stop the train for mercy's sake!”

And the wild wind and rain received her call, for neither guard nor fellow-passengers could hear.

In despair Dora shouted, and no one heeded, and to her intense misery her mother did not seem to hear her or to feel the blast which rushed in by the open window.

Daylight was waning, and it seemed so dreadful to encounter the darkness. She closed the window, and sat supporting her mother; then came a brief stop; but she could not now get the window to open. She cried out in vain, the scream of the engine drowned her voice, and the train was again in motion.

The London terminus at last. Dora looked out on the platform: not one familiar face,

not one who minded her. People hurried to and fro ; she said something to the man who took her tickets, but he made no remark.

Her mother was yet alive, but it was all she could say, and she appealed to all who passed by the carriage ; but they looked and passed on, supposing she had addressed the wrong person.

Men and women stared at her wan face ; some thought she was looking for her maid, others that she sought a friend—all left her to seek on. Dora could get no one to listen to her tale.

At length a solitary man approached ; it was a comfort to see one apart from the throng.

“ Oh sir ! will you call some one ? ” said Dora.

“ Who shall I call ? What name ? ”

“ Oh ! anyone, to lift my mother out ! ”

The man came back with two or three railway officials.

“ What is this ? What is the matter ? ”

“ The lady is dying ? ” said another.

“ Where does she live ? ” asked the guard.

“ The hotel,” groaned Dora, who began to

collect their effects, and two porters gently lifted Mrs. Handon from the carriage.

"She must stay at the station," said one of them, kindly.

"The hotel," again said Dora, with an effort.

"The young lady is right; a doctor is wanted; call a cab."

"I will go with them," said the stranger.

"Where to?" he asked.

"The hotel," once more Dora said, and put her purse into his hand. He saw she was paralysed with terror and grief, and troubled her no more. In what part of London the hotel was to which she had written had passed from her memory. Poor girl! her mother was almost gone; there was no time to lose; the stranger had taken a few shillings from the purse and given it back. He paid the porters in less time than it occupies to tell of it; he was struck with sorrow for Dora, and gave the cabman word "to the 'Golden Angel,' Golden Square."

It was so central he thought, he could thence easily make inquiries, and meet with some one who was interested in these travellers; he did

not like to wound Dora with further questions or delay.

"They are bringing in a dead person," said a waiter, to the attendant at the bar of the "Golden Angel."

"Oh, I hope not! No, she is ill, not dead," and the woman went forward to meet the sick lady. A young girl followed with large, dark eyes, and a Spanish sort of face, stolid and pale; she was stunned. The strange gentleman gave orders for a doctor to be sent for, and they carried Helen to a bed-room.

No word forsook the lips of Dora; she saw her mother placed upon the bed, and in her bonnet and travelling dress, she sat, too, beside her, without removing her own, looking hopelessly into her mother's face.

Half-an-hour passed; the mistress of the house, and the chambermaids shed floods of tears; the strange man sent a porter for his luggage to the station, then ordered dinner and a bed.

The mistress asked about Dora's luggage, and if it should be got, but Dora neither spoke nor stirred.

Some minutes went by ; she felt the hand within her grasp grow cold, and a voice, after some sort of confusion, said,—

“ Miss, let me remove you.” It was the tender-hearted chamber-maid. The doctor stood by, and the stranger, too.

“ Who shall I write to ? ”

“ Major Talbot.”

“ Can you give me his address ? ”

“ I forget,” said Dora, absently.

“ We must try to remember it,” said the doctor, gently ; and Dora, like a person in a trance, went to the bed, and feeling in the pocket of her mother’s black silk dress, drew forth a letter and handed it to him. The letter was dated some weeks back from Hastings, but mentioned another address, and also “ Blydon’s Hotel,” London.

Both the gentlemen read it.

“ That is the hotel the young lady meant,” said the stranger. “ Can you give the poor girl something to sustain her ? I see she shakes her head at tea or coffee, which the women are offering. I will go to Blydon’s and try to make out something of this Major Talbot.”

The doctor administered some drops in a glass of water, and induced Dora to lie on a sofa.

She was so calm that he was afraid she was too much shocked, and dreaded the result.

Unexpectedly for all parties, but not the less fortunately, Major Talbot arrived in town that evening. The stranger heard of him at Blydon's, and found a room had been prepared for Mrs. and Miss Handon.

The remains of poor Helen Handon were in time conveyed to the church-yard near her home, and deposited with due ceremony.

Dora never asked the name of the gentleman who had befriended her, but she had thanked him from her heart, and, with much tact and dignity, begged his acceptance of a pretty diamond cross, which she took from her dressing-case. He tried to avoid her present, but she said,—

“I hope you have a wife or daughter, please keep it; they will like to know how kind you have been.” And the gentleman saw it would cause her pain if he refused.

“Have you any attendant in London?” he

asked, for he felt something like mistrust of her overruling friend, and she replied,—

“Yes, thank you,” quite calmly.

Now in Paris they had no maid ; but Eliza, the chamber-maid at the “Golden Angel,” had offered her services, and obtained permission to go with Dora from the mistress of the establishment ; so Eliza Batting became Dora’s maid, and stood between her and many an annoyance.

CHAPTER XIII.

DUSSELDORF.

IF Dora, on revisiting the home of her childhood, had any idea of remaining there, she found herself mistaken, for Major Talbot informed her that he was her guardian, and that he intended her to spend a year at a *pensionnat de demoiselles*, at Dusseldorf. Dora agreed without difficulty, and even granted to herself that it was, perhaps, the best way to get over the first miserable year of bereavement. He even left her to choose whether she would be in the house, or attend daily as an *externe*, and she preferred the latter, because she could keep Batting, who seemed already like a faithful friend; and Dora wrote to the mother of her old governess, Marie Vertmann, to accept them as lodgers.

He had overlooked this, and repented of having yielded to her wishes, when he found her mind turning contentedly towards Dusseldorf. So he did his utmost to provoke Eliza Batting to leave his ward ; but she only the more closely set herself to guard her charge, and felt as if pledged to the dead mother to mind Dora as much as a girl in her situation could watch over the orphan daughter, and she did a solemn duty.

Dora, in her deep mourning, attracted much sympathy, but did not make intimacies. She applied herself to her studies, and sought to balance her mind with them, and not to be cast down by sorrow. Her letters to Ethel were more trite and constructed than formerly ; she had nothing to write about but herself, no happiness to tell about, no details about her dear mother.

Major Farnham having made direct application about his wife's fortune, was told there was none ; and neither he nor Ethel could understand it. Dora knew he was not well pleased.

At the end of six months Major Talbot came

to pay her a visit, but he was always on the move, so she felt no surprise. She could not be pleased, for she disliked him, but, as her father's will had appointed him her guardian, she treated him on that account with respect.

"I hope your studies progress as they should?"

"I believe the masters are satisfied," she said.

"It is important that you should make the most strenuous exertions, and make up for lost time."

"Lost time! I do not understand you."

"Because you have lost time, and your talents will have to serve you."

"How! Major Talbot."

"To serve you, I repeat."

"My time has not been wasted, and in Paris it was not lost; and if, sir, you expect me to become a teacher or governess you may at once dismiss the idea."

Dora's eyes flashed. She continued,—

"I have, I know, three or four hundred a year of my own, besides dear mamma's savings of which I do not mean to be deprived; and

as soon as I am old enough I hope to be able to make you understand that Ethel's money has yet to undergo explanation; everyone knew she was to have a good sum when dear papa——”

She did not finish—nor did her guardian say a word aloud—he only thought,—

“So, so, young lady, here will be a fine spirit to deal with—Musgrave Talbot may look out for himself.”

A year passed away at Dusseldorf; then Dora spent two or three months in London at Lady Meath's fine house in Belgravia. Lady Meath was absent, but the housekeeper took charge of the young lady and her maid, and Charlie two or three times called to see her, when he ran up to town from Brighton on business, or to divert himself. Lady Meath never thought it necessary to ask Dora to see her at Brighton, nor did she want a niece there who had beautiful eyes, and one she would have felt it a duty to chaperone.

Her next move was to a house which her flighty guardian took at Warringdale in Ireland, and this became more like home than

any other ; but not until she refused to go any more to the boarding house in Dublin, where he left her twice, without the means of leaving, and she was subjected to unpleasant remarks and disagreeable companions ; so at length she got leave to stay at Warringdale and unpacked her books.

Of Mrs. Broom and her daughters, and strange nephew, she heard nothing ; perhaps kind-hearted Mrs. Broom had a new *protégée* by this time, or was displeased at her abrupt departure, and did not care about her more. Charlie Meath told her of a great deal of praise which Bishop had spoken of her to him ; but far more did he say for Gertrude ; he even said she had promised to marry him if he ever asked her, which he declared might come to be an event in due time. Bishop Broom was a "wandering soul," he said, and he did not believe rest would agree with him.

Dora made no friends at Warringdale ; indeed, the inhabitants were so accustomed to see strange faces, that they came and went without making lasting impressions, except in a few cases.

Dora too had felt too little at ease with her guardian to mind about cultivating friendships, when she might be told they were improper ; yet she knew where she could crave hospitality, so she went to Mrs. Roberts of The Lodge, when a *fracas* caused the door to be closed against her, and she knew Mr. Horne the curate whom she met there, and there she met Dr. Morton ; and immediately after Major Talbot and she both disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COMING OF THE MAORIES.

THE letter of Lady Meath which caused so much sensation, ran thus :—

“MY DEAR NIECE,

“I am overwhelmed, and it is my sad lot to have to tell you that news has reached England of the death of your half-sister Mrs. George Farnham, and in a day or two I am expected to receive five children, as well as my unseen nephew, their father. Why they should come home I cannot tell, nor why I am to endure the young Maories? it will be quite impossible. You must come to them at once. Colonel Farnham only asks me to shelter them till he can find a home, their mother being dead. Set off at once.

“Yours truly, ANNA MEATH.”

Thus Dora's heart ached again. It had throbbed in new delight for one day only, and now she must go, to leave Warringdale most likely for ever. And Ethel her sister, so dear though unseen for years, Ethel was dead. She did not remember her brother-in-law, but there was a miniature of him amongst her mother's relics, of a slight youthful person in uniform.

And five children ! then one must be quite an infant, she had only known of four ; some infantine complaint carried away two long since, this new one had possibly been the cause of Ethel's death.

She must go, and she packed her books and took all she cared for ; she must go, and shield these little ones from Lady Meath, whose austere ways, and blunt unfeeling words, would frighten little children, and chill her widowed brother-in-law, and make him bear his loss yet worse.

Dora hastened, as we said, her preparations, and travelling by Holyhead reached London quickly, and drove to Lady Meath's. Her aunt received her with something bordering upon cordiality.

"Are the children come?" Dora asked.

"Yes, and are all in bed; so you can rest in peace for this evening, and see to-morrow what is to be done; they cannot stay here."

"Is Colonel Farnham come too?"

"No, he is to arrive to-morrow with the baggage. I do think it somewhat cool, his expecting me to feel interest about his doings," said Lady Meath.

Dora left her aunt soon after, she and Bating had been provided with rooms, and were well cared for; Dora was glad to eat and sleep, for she was tired in body and mind. She looked at the children in their beds, and felt glad to have something of Ethel near, at any rate, and was awakened in the morning by a lusty cry or two from the nursery, and when she made her way thither she was astonished at the sight of a great year old boy who roared at her; she had expected a more minute specimen of the baby, and forgot how long the journey and voyage had taken. A soldier's wife tried in vain to appease him.

"Oh Master Charles! look at the nice lady."

Dora sat beside him and presently he took her into his friendship, and as soon as he was quiet, she began to ask about her sister, and begged the woman to tell her all she knew.

“Why, you see, dear ma’am, I was not with her; but only took charge of the baby coming home. I did hear some of the wives say she was an uncommon nice lady, but never saw her to my knowledge.”

Poor Dora could hardly bear the woman’s vulgar look and gestures, they grated upon her feelings; and she tried to grow fond of “Ethel’s baby,” but he was not an agreeable specimen, but “mighty cross,” as the nurse affirmed.

The door opened, and a girl nearly as tall as herself entered; a tall, smiling, fine creature who said,—

“Are you Aunt Dora?”

“Yes, and I suppose you are Warna?”

Warna kissed her aunt and led her away to see her sisters—pretty graceful girls—who were so glad to meet her, it gave Dora a thrill of joy.

Adelaïs was shorter than Warna, but as

bright-looking and intelligent as her sister. Margaret was perfectly beautiful, and clung to Dora's neck, and tears in her eyes showed how glad she was to have some one in place of a mother.

Hector joined them soon, a fine boy, but tall and slight, like his elder sister; they were fine grown, well-bred looking children, and Dora was pleased with all.

"How dreadful baby is to-day," said Adelaïs.

"Mrs. Guys makes more noise than he does," said Hector. "I believe she frightens him into fits of squealing."

"Yes, I think she does," said another.

"Who dressed you all?" asked their aunt.

"We do for ourselves, but your maid came in to do Margaret's hair; here are some biscuits, Hector. I hope we shall get breakfast soon."

Warna was able to manage and arrange for them all. Dora started off to her old friend the housekeeper, who soon promised breakfast in the back-parlour, for Adelaïs and Hector said they were "starving."

Lady Meath had expected to see them all at her ten o'clock meal, and was in ecstasy when Dora told her they had been cared for long ago ; neither did she hear voices or extra noise of any kind, Batting having taken out the party for an airing, and insisted on having also Mrs. Guys and baby ; so Lady Meath ate her breakfast in undisturbed silence, and thanked her stars that she had sent for Dora.

Afterwards Miss Handon and Batting went out, and after that, the girls were all set to a piece of gay worsted-work, and Hector had a thick new story book which would occupy him for many an hour, and baby slept till after an early dinner had been happily got over, and when Dora appeared in the drawing-room Lady Meath said,—

“I give you credit, Miss Handon.”

“I have your pardon then for daring to give orders.”

“Only keep the young Maories off me !”

“They are very good children.”

“So much the better, their father had better give them over to you ; I shall tell him you know how to tame monsters.”

A visitor prevented Dora adding anything, and another and another followed, and late came Bishop Broom; he paid his respects to Lady Meath, who said,—

“I thought you were in the other hemisphere.”

“I go to-morrow,” he replied.

He did not shake hands with Dora, but bowed to her in his peculiar way; he did not look awkward, only unlike anybody else in the world; but, before there was time for any conversation in that busy room, where people seem to meet from the four quarters of the earth, the groom of the chambers announced,—

“Colonel Farnham.”

A handsome, stout, tall, noble-looking man shook hands with Lady Meath, who seemed well pleased with his appearance, and said,—

“You will dine here to day; your children are quite safe. This is Dora,” and brother and sister-in-law were presented, and as Lady Meath was so surrounded, Dora asked him a few questions, such as were safe to ask in public; she could not do more, and whilst they

were talking quietly and as strangers would, she was conscious of the farewell of Bishop Broom, who made her a lower bow than ever and disappeared.

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